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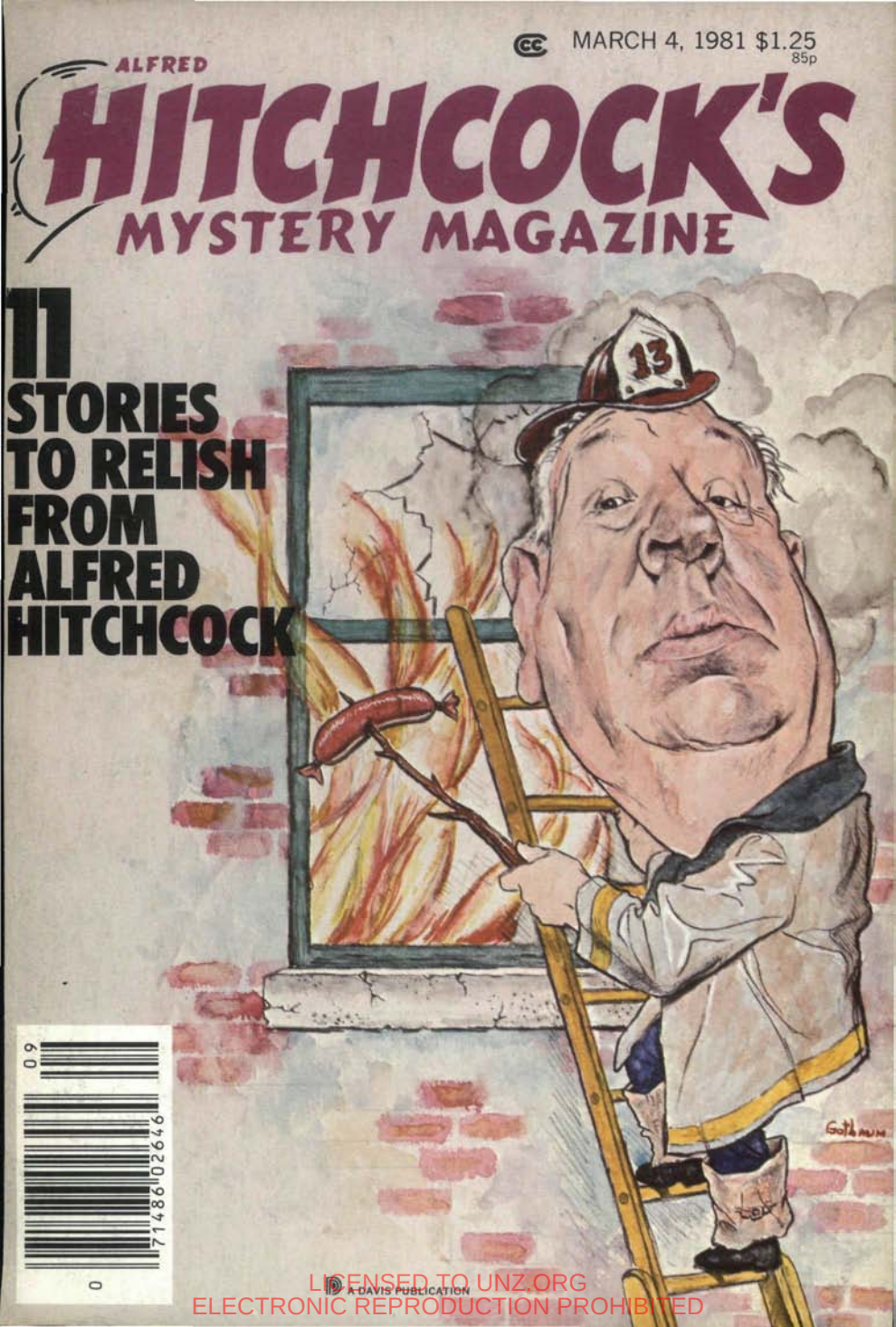

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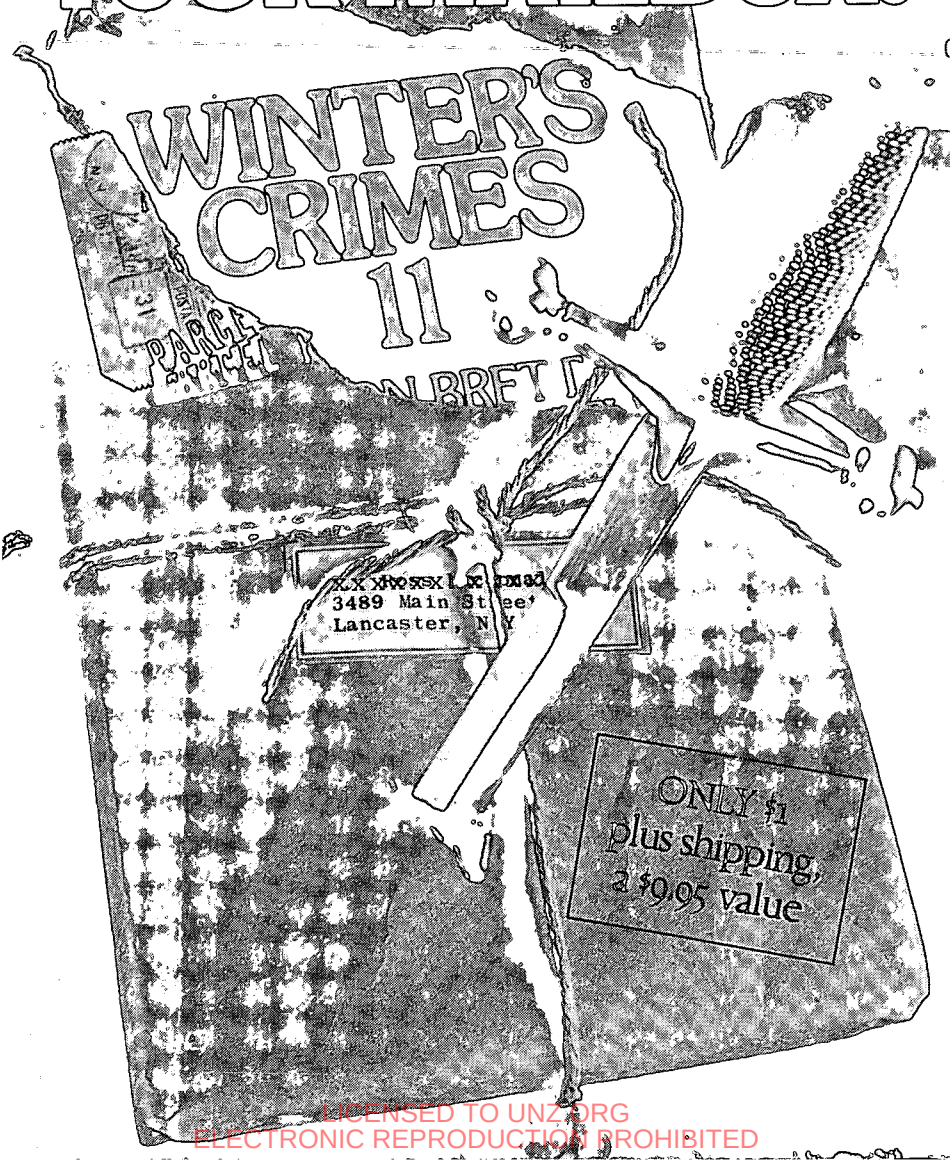

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March 4, 1981

Dear Reader:

This issue takes us through time and space to investigate crimes of all kinds and at all levels of society. An Irish servant girl in 1912 "borrows" her mistress' earrings with disastrous results in Jean Darling's "Tell Me True."

A woman seeks help in finding her missing husband, a world-famous photographer, in "A Case of Missing Identity" by James McKimmey. An unemployed man overhears an intriguing reference to "The Hundred-Thousand-Dollar Wall" in Mark Townley's tale of shady doings, and an old man suddenly dies at a fund-raising event on his fabulous estate in Theodore S. Drachman's "The Brunchupper Murder Case."

A cop on a ski vacation almost literally runs into a body in the snow in "Whiteout" by Kenneth Gavrell. The members of a minor-league baseball team fall under suspicion of poisoning in Richard Ciciarelli's "Heavy Bet." And Robert Twohy shows what can happen when a man is more interested in TV sports than in his own "Flesh and Blood."

Good reading.

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VOLUME 26, NO. 3 MARCH 4, 1981

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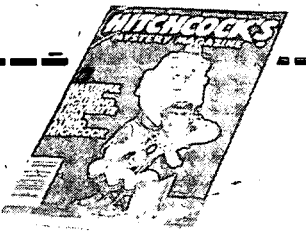

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Francine had come to slay the ogre . . .

THE FRAME

by ERNEST SAVAGE

Francine hated the big Spanish-style house on the hill. In her childhood, some thirty-five years ago, its looming bulk, the wrought-iron grillework over its deep-set windows, had evoked prisons and dungeons in her suggestible mind; a house where an ogre lived.

She didn't linger in front of the place, but hurried into the protective shade of its arched entryway. In the old days the front door hadn't been as close to the street as it was now. In the old days a gently curving drive

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wound through a part of the grove from the road below. But that land had been sold off years ago, subdivided—a word heavy with consequence, like vivisected.

She had taken a bus from her brother's house to the corner of Almond and Hillside. There had been four people on the bus besides herself, a quartet of somnolent Sunday-afternoon loners going from point A to point B in bleak indifference. Only she had seemed to be charged with purpose; but no one had paid her any mind—and that, of course, was good.

Walking up Hillside past the expensive ranch-style homes that had replaced what had once been the family grove, the mid-afternoon sun beat down on the tight blonde wig she wore. And the heavily padded girdle, giving her the look of an overweight matron, felt more like a strait jacket than at any time since she'd wriggled into it early that morning. But she trudged on, her back deliberately bowed, her head down, until she came to the bulky rising façade of Uncle Charley's place. There her head snapped up and her pale eyes narrowed. She had come to slay the ogre.

The heavy oak, rounded-top front door seemed as formidable and forbidding to her now as it ever had. In the old days a maid—always young and nubile, she recalled bitterly—would peek out through the little grilled window before letting her in, usually with a giggle. But Uncle Charley was alone in the house now, a genuine full-time recluse. She'd phoned him a couple of weeks ago to make sure of that—among other things.

She pressed the lotus-shaped latch with the point of her elbow, heard the answering click inside, and the door swung open. She paused, listening, before stepping onto the blood-red tiles of the gloomy entry hall and closing the door behind her. She would reprimand him for leaving the door unlocked.

It had been seven years since she'd stood in this hall. Then, with her third husband George—now deceased—in tow for a dutiful call on the family elder, she had been almost light of heart and had felt some actual affection for the old man—old then, older now. Ancient. But now her heart was cold. He'd rejected all of her humiliating petitions for aid, had told her that she, like her brother Bill, must wait for him to die first. But one can attend upon an impending death for just so long before it becomes a sentence to a prison without bars. She'd had enough.

Seven years ago he had greeted George and herself at the door, still

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a hale and quick-limbed man. But he had expected their visit then.

The cavernous living room to her left was empty, the drapes drawn across the tall windows, the huge fireplace a black hole at the far end of the room. She had never seen a fire burning there. Uncle Charley had always used the library upstairs as his living room. He was probably there now. Seven years ago he'd shown George and herself an oil painting he was working on in that room, a painting of the last yacht he'd owned. (It was a very poor painting but she and George had praised it.) He kept his coin and stamp collections in the library too.

She stopped abruptly at the foot of the staircase, surprised, almost shocked to see an elevator-chair arrangement adjacent to the wall, the chair at the upstairs end of the line. It bespoke a serious illness. She had not been told, and it gave her a rush of nerves. She was acting just in time; he must not be allowed to die of natural causes.

Moving purposefully now, she went on up the stairs and down the hall to the open library door. He was seated on a straight-back upholstered chair, bent studiously over an open album of stamps on the library table in the left center of the room. A desk lamp cast a hard white light on the album. A pair of flip-up magnifying lenses were attached to his glasses. When he heard her steps against the parquet floor and turned, he looked to her like an aged extraterrestrial, his eyes big as plates and wobbly as uncooked eggs. An ogre.

She gasped, but mostly at the specter of his senile flesh. He had wasted away alarmingly and the sight triggered her own neurotic fear of death. To allay that fear, she walked aggressively over to the table and faced him.

"Who—?" he said, and flipped up the magnifying lenses. "Francine—?"

"Yes."

"You're blonde and fat. What happened to you?"

"I'm wearing a wig, and the fat is padding."

"Why are you here? Why didn't you call first? Padding? What do you mean, padding?"

"Can't you guess?"

"No. What is there to guess?"

His voice was firm, the questions sharp, the old forcefulness intact—but he was all bones and translucent flesh.

"I phoned you," she said savagely, "two weeks ago today. For the tenth time I asked you for help."

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"And I said I could give you none."

"You said you *would* give me none."

"I said 'could', Francine. I'm broke."

"All I want is a thousand a month. You can spare that easily."

Uncle Charley grinned. "I don't have a third that much."

She felt the pressure of fury build behind her eyes. In her purse, hanging heavily from a strap on her left shoulder, was her brother Bill's Smith & Wesson revolver, a weapon that had belonged to their father. She'd had slightly variant plans in mind. In the first, she walked in with the gun in her hand and shot him without a word. In the second, she talked to him first and then shot him; and, since she was talking to him now, she supposed plan two was in effect. She had feared a weakness of will at the last minute and it was on her now. She would have to build her anger up again.

"You're lying!" she said bitterly. "You've lied to me all my life!"

Uncle Charley laughed, a deliberate old man's parody of a laugh. "Why would I bother?"

"It's *family money!*" she roared. "You've had the use of it long enough!"

"Money has no family, you foolish girl. Money is the product of labor, and belongs to whoever owns it."

"You've never lifted a finger in your life!"

"Ah!" said Uncle Charley, "*that's* where you're wrong." He pointed toward his head. "I work in *here*." His old eyes dropped and scanned the stamp album and the open ledger on the table before him. In the tending of his beloved stamps he was a working man, even if otherwise he never had been. The mere act of collecting and organizing and caring for these small, colorful bits of paper for the last forty or fifty years had been a financial coup. The collection was worth at least a quarter of a million dollars. But he'd seldom had the heart or been in dire enough straits to sell even one of the stamps.

But this strange, unhappy niece of his was right. It had been an easy life; one he now sensed without dismay was approaching its end. Her ambiguous remarks had been such thinly veiled threats, he wondered if Bill had told her that he occupied this place only on a life tenancy basis, that it had been sold long ago along with everything else but the stamps. But no, Bill mustn't have, or she'd never have been deluded enough to demand a thousand a month.

Poor lass—she wanted so much out of life, but offered so little in

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exchange. She was a "gimme" girl. And her looks, her single asset, were swiftly fading away.

"Where are your coins?" she demanded to know. Stamps meant nothing to her, but coins were money, and the sight of them would be reassuring. There had once been a display case of them against the wall behind her but it was gone, along with much else in the room—chairs, tables, a couple of Kurdistani rugs, most of the pictures from the wall, Uncle Charley's painting gear. Behind one of the pictures, she remembered, there had been a wall safe. She looked toward it now and said, "They're in the safe, aren't they?"

"If you choose to think so." It was one of his deliberately infuriating remarks. She let it feed her rage. He had always mocked her and put her down, had always favored Bill. It was a good thing some sort of codicil in Grandfather's will protected her right to half the estate now that only she and Bill were left. Then, in a wave of knee-buckling doubt, she wondered if somehow the wily old devil had disinherited her.

"There *is* just Bill and me in the will, isn't there, Uncle Charley?"

"I've left everything to the Society for the Protection of Elderly Bachelors from Rapacious Nieces."

Such was the state of her nerves that for two heartbeats she believed him. Then that graveyard laugh gurgled in his throat and she turned, her fury screwed almost high enough, and walked to the French doors leading to the balcony that overlooked the back lawn. As a child standing there, she'd seen nothing but orange trees in every direction—"all ours," her mother had told her. Now, a hundred feet away, the heavy shake-shingle roof of some stranger's house rose above the few ill-cared-for trees remaining, and she was concerned that some near neighbor might hear the sound of the gun when it went off.

But the doors were stout, she reminded herself. The walls of the rambling old place were thick and ivy-covered all around—soundproof.

She turned, reassured, and made a brief tour of the room, recounting now one by one the missing items, and wondering for a querulous moment if the old *bon vivant* had indeed sold out the whole estate. But there was still the house itself, the coins in the safe and the stamps—whatever they might be worth—for her to live decently on now that George was dead. The heart of the plan was that Bill get nothing. For a lot of reasons.

It was nearly four-thirty. Her connecting flight from Clausen to L.A. would take off at six. Bill, she knew, was due here at about five-thirty

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for his regular Sunday visit. She must get on with it. With her back to Charley at his table, she produced surgical gloves from her purse and slipped them on, then took out Bill's revolver, ugly smelly thing that it was. Then she turned to face her despised relative for the last time. But he had slumped in his chair, his arms loose at his sides, his head resting on the ledger book. Francine gasped aloud and stepped forward.

He was dead. His breathing and heartbeat had stopped, possibly minutes ago—she'd paid him no mind as she looked around the room. Her panic turned to cold fury. Another frustration, another dirty trick played on her by this evil old man. But she would not be thwarted—she'd planned it too long, needed it too much. She took his shoulders roughly and pressed him back into a sitting position, then scurried around to the front of the table and, with the gun clutched in both hands, tracked his heart as his upper body sagged slowly left, firing off a shot that stayed his progress for a moment before his torso draped itself over the padded arm of the chair and hung there, twice dead.

The noise of the shot hadn't surprised her—she'd prepared herself for that—but the sudden sharp smell of cordite did. But it wasn't unpleasant; it was a hearty odor, in fact. She liked it, it braced her.

She dropped the gun back into her purse but kept the gloves on. Then she gave a cursory glance through the French door windows, expecting no movement and seeing none. She felt a rising exhilaration. She'd done it!

The stamps tempted her for a moment. Bill was a collector too, having been started in the hobby as a kid by Uncle Charley. If the police assumed that he'd killed his uncle—as they surely must—wouldn't it be logical that he'd also stolen some stamps? It wasn't a point she'd thought out completely before, and it nagged at her now. At first she thought she'd take a few at random—just to enhance the odds—but that was the rub, wasn't it? Bill wouldn't take them at random; he'd take specific issues. And, if she took some now, she'd never be able to dispose of them safely. It would be like destroying her own money, and that was unthinkable.

She turned and left the room, walking downstairs and out of the house and closing the door behind her before removing the gloves and dropping them into her purse.

It was 4:36. At 4:45—according to the posted schedule at the corner of Almond and Hillside—a bus would stop to take her back to town. She hurried. She had to make that bus.

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When their mother died fifteen years earlier, Francine had been happy to balance cash against the value of the house and let Bill have it. Now the cash was gone but the house remained, probably worth three or four times as much as it had been then. That was another source of resentment. She'd gotten the short end of things all her life. But she'd kept her old key to the back door and had let herself in with it earlier that afternoon, as she did again now.

She went directly to the room her father had called the den. His old flat-top desk was in the corner where it had always been and she went straight to it, put on the surgical gloves again, took the gun from her purse, and put it in the lower right-hand drawer, where it had been kept since before she was born, and where she'd gotten it an hour and fifty minutes ago.

She didn't linger; she was cutting it too fine as it was. The flight schedules had given her no choice, determining precisely both the time of her arrival and her departure. She left by the back door, locking it behind her, walked briskly back to Seventh Street, turned north there, and proceeded two blocks further to the cab stand in front of the New Clausen Hotel. She was bending to enter a cab when she saw Bill's 1965 Buick Skylark drive past ten feet in front of her and her heart leaped. It had been perilously close; but, she exulted, it was over and now he was doomed.

She told the cabbie to take her to the airport.

Uncle Charley collected United States stamps exclusively, but every year he bought all four volumes of the Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue, which listed every stamp ever issued by any country—or tried to. When Bill occasionally picked up a foreign item for his collection, which was less exclusive than Charley's, he'd take it on his Sunday evening visit and show it to Charley. Last Tuesday he had picked up an 1870 French issue, the ten-centime Bistre on Rose, one of the tete bêche varieties.

Bill enjoyed his collection and gave it all the time he could—two or three hours a week. That was the trouble: to maintain a proper stamp collection took a lot more time. There were too many variables in stamps, too many things to know. The difference between a hundred-dollar stamp and a ten-thousand-dollar stamp of the same denomination and issue was often too subtle for his untrained eye to see. Take the ten-centime Bistre

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on Rose, for instance. It could be worth ten times the fifty dollars he'd given the dealer for it, or ten times less. Or nothing. A scratch too minute to see without a jeweler's loupe or an imperceptible stain would ruin it. A damaged perforation, a thin spot, color toning a bit off— It was an old man's game; it took a retiree's time.

He pulled the Buick into his garage, got out, walked across his tidy back yard, and entered the house through the kitchen door. It was five-twenty and he was running a bit late. He phoned Shakey's Pizza Parlor on Seventh, ordered the number three medium, Uncle Charley's favorite, washed his hands at the sink, and went into the den. The Bistre on Rose was in a small glassine envelope in the locked center drawer of the desk. He unlocked the drawer, took out the envelope, and studied it a moment in the crepuscular light of the room. The noble head of Napoleon the Third in chin-up profile. Bill frowned and sniffed, raised the stamp to his nose, and sniffed again. Then he put the stamp carefully in a flat wallet in his jacket pocket, walked to the door of the room, turned, and sniffed again. Something? Or nothing? Who knew what was contaminating the air these days.

He was feeling rushed as he returned to the car. He liked to be on time for his visits to Charley. It was all he could do for the old man any more, and the pizza, they'd said, would be ready in fifteen minutes. Charley liked it hot.

It was a funny thing, he often thought later, but the whole story, the complete picture, flashed clear in his mind when he walked up Charley's staircase and got the first whiff of cordite. Then the picture fragmented and scattered and would come together again only in its own time and order.

Charley was draped over the left arm of his chair. The bullet that had killed him had gone through his body and the upholstered back of the chair and was somewhere out of immediate sight. Instinctively, almost clinically, Bill made sure his uncle was dead, then studied the open album of stamps on the table, turning the stiff pages with the tip of his finger. It looked intact, untouched. Nothing else in the room looked disturbed either, but Bill was beginning to grieve now and was not too attentive. Some filthy bastard! Some demented hophead!

How many times had he told Charley to keep the front door securely locked?

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The only phone in the house was down in the kitchen where he'd left the pizza and six-pack of beer he'd brought. He was on his way back down to call the police when he stopped abruptly, a piece of the broken picture clear in his mind for an instant, then fading away. But something told him to go back, look at the stamps once again first.

Returning, he stared at the familiar album, Charley's pride and joy. Nothing. In the blur of his grief he saw nothing—but he gave himself more time.

There was in Charley's ledger a note on every stamp he'd ever bought, sold, or traded. The first entry had been made in 1928, the last one two months ago. Charley had never indicated in writing the price he'd paid or received for a stamp. He'd developed a language of symbols for that purpose, partly to confound the IRS, partly to confuse competitors, friends, and even his nephew. It was a game Charley played with increasing cunning and care as he aged, as if it had something to do with his own immortality. But Bill knew that the best forty items in the collection were worth at least a quarter of a million dollars and he knew which items they were, having examples of all of them himself, though his own were worth only a tenth of the value of Charley's, if that. It was what kept him so tentative at the game: the infinite range of values in things that looked identical.

The shock was wearing off. His grief was taking over. Charley had been his family. Certainly his sister had never been. These Sunday-night visits weren't a duty but a pleasure. Last week Francine had phoned for the first time in years and sneered, "Do you still visit the old fossil every Sunday night?" She didn't understand; Charley was of the blood, a link in the chain. And she'd asked if he still kept the store open Sunday afternoons until five—another piece of the fragmented picture coming clear again and staying clear. The pieces were reassembling themselves now, but sluggishly, incredulity slowing their way. After all, she *was* his sister; Charley's niece.

He should be downstairs calling the cops. That's what an honest man would do, wasn't it? Report a crime as soon as he could? And that's what she'd expected him to do. But a second level of his mind had sensed danger, smelled the trap, the frame. She'd used his gun for the killing. If he brought the police in now they'd find it where she'd returned it, in his desk. She still had a key to the back door. Another thing: the store was doing poorly. A few more months like the last few and he might have

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to close—as his bank knew, and as he'd made the mistake of telling Francine on the phone. Opportunity, means, and motive, all in one neat bundle. And with him put away for murder, she'd inherit the estate—which was the whole point to her careful little scheme. The law doesn't permit a murderer to profit from his crime.

But her dream castle was built on sand. Except for the stamps, there wasn't any estate. What Charley owed would more than wipe out his few remaining assets.

Now a growing sense of urgency told Bill that time was of the essence. He had a great deal to do, and less than an hour, he figured generously, to do it in. At speed, but with infinite care, he selected Charley's forty best stamps and put them in the same flat wallet in his jacket pocket. Then he went downstairs and out to his car and drove home furtively.

It was 6:45. He'd found Charley dead nearly an hour ago. In Charley's kitchen, growing cold, was the pizza he'd picked up at Shakey's at twenty-five to six. He picked up a pizza at Shakey's almost every week about that same time. And Shakey's was no more than ten minutes from Charley's house. So why hadn't he called the cops at, say, ten minutes to six?

There was no reasonable answer to that question. And none to the question of what to do with the gun, now wrapped in a plastic bag in the desk in front of him. But thank God he had a good sense of smell. If he hadn't sniffed out that trace of cordite in this room and linked it with the heavier stink of it at Charley's, he'd now be trying to explain why his gun had killed that dear old man.

He shuddered and got on with the task of gathering forty stamps from his motley collection to replace Charley's quarter-million-dollars' worth, taking ironic comfort in knowing that, even if he was convicted of the murder, his sister would get nothing for her efforts.

It was a quarter to eight when he called the police from Charley's kitchen phone.

At nine o'clock Wednesday morning Sergeant Jeffrey Peckinpaugh was seated in one of the two brand-new laminated and contoured chairs in front of Lieutenant Wells's large simulated-teakwood desk. Across the hairless and shining top of Wells's forward-tilted head, Peckinpaugh could see reflected the bank of ceiling-hung fluorescent tubes that filled the plush, thickly carpeted, alien-feeling room with a hard, soulless light.

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Wells was working on a stack of reports and probably had been, Peckinpaugh mused, since the crack of dawn. He was seated in the slat-back golden oak time- and crisis-stained swivel chair he'd salvaged last week from his office in the old building across Eleventh Street from this new one. The chair was his symbol of rebellion against the outlandish elegance and sophistication of the new building, bonded and built before California's Proposition 13 had cut back the golden gusher of public funds.

Chief Jamison, in his corner top-floor office three times this large, had told Wells to "throw that goddamn squeaking horror the hell out of my new building," to which Wells had rejoined bitterly, "This chair and my butt are as one. If this chair goes, the butt goes with it!" Wells's thirty-seven dedicated years on the Clausen police force permitted an occasional insubordination, but that clash had been close.

Wells set aside a folder and read from the face of the next, "Marston, Charles. Homicide."

Peckinpaugh wriggled reflexively in his sleek, uncomfortable chair. In Wells's old office across the street they'd had powerful slat-back companion pieces to Wells's swivel chair that you could lean back in, your feet planted firmly on the linoleum-covered floor or, now and again in moments of triumph or ease, one foot against the edge of Wells's battered desk, the other swinging loose, with no fear of the back legs busting off. In this Eames-type affair you could only sit. You couldn't *live* in it.

"A puzzler, Chief," Peckinpaugh said. "No known enemies, no busted windows or doors, no—"

"What about the nephew?" Wells tapped the top sheet in the folder he had opened.

"William Marston," Peckinpaugh said. "I know him."

Wells looked up with interest.

"He and I both coach in the Little League—he more regularly than I on account of the unevenness of my line of work. Days, he runs an antique shop at 1709 North Main Street."

"Any alibi?"

"Not perfect. He claims to have been in his store at the most probable time of death—around four-thirty, five o'clock. But no corroborating customers. The store and the murder scene are about twenty minutes apart."

"He could have done it?"

"Yes."

"Motive?"

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"He and a sister—living in Hannibal, Missouri—inherit. Bill admits his store's in trouble. But the estate appears to be push-push."

Wells sighed. "Meaning—?"

"Net product: enough to bury him, plus maybe four or five thousand. But that's a preliminary estimate. He was a stamp collector. The collection's being appraised in L.A. now by—that name in the folder."

"Who's the administrator?"

"The chief suspect—my friend, the nephew."

"If he's a friend maybe I'd better take you off the case."

"Why? My friends aren't necessarily guilty."

"Only of low association. O.K., what about the gun?"

In his decade or so on this side of Wells's desk, Peckinpaugh had seldom lied, withheld information, or even distorted the truth. Now he did, obliquely. "Search of the premises, grounds, and neighborhood has turned up no weapon. The bullet—a thirty-eight—extracted from the soft wood of the wall of the victim's library is being run through ballistics by Carlson downstairs, but you know the odds on that."

Actually, Peckinpaugh knew exactly where the murder weapon was—in the bottom drawer of William Marston's desk, where it had always been. On reviewing what he'd just said, he decided it wasn't a lie, just a withholding—like the government's nip out of your paycheck—to be accounted for later.

Wells flipped a page and read something out loud. "Paraffin test on hands of William Marston, negative. So your friend wore gloves."

"If he did it he wore gloves."

Wells leaned back in his chair. A pleasing and beloved squeak issued from its base. He smiled briefly. "I want this killer found. I mean *especially*. You've got your friends, Sergeant, and I've got mine. Charles Marston was a friend of mine and of my father's. Thirty-eight years ago he helped me get this job. I want his killer caught."

"I'll do my best, boss." Peckinpaugh had almost blushed. Wells waited till Wednesday to announce that the victim was a friend of his. If he'd told him that on Monday, or even Tuesday, Peckinpaugh probably wouldn't have involved himself in the elaborate and dubious plan he and Marston—but mostly Marston—had worked up. Getting out of the awkward chair to leave Wells's office, he suppressed a heavy sigh.

Gene McVey, the Medical Examiner, was as happy as a rich man's

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bride in his new quarters. When Peckinpaugh walked into his office ten minutes later that morning, he had his feet up on his brand new desk and was steeply relaxed into his high-back naugahyde swivel chair, a clone of the one Wells had refused to allow through his door. The air above McVey's head was thickly marbled with cigarette smoke, as usual, its source dangling from his nether lip.

"Anything new," Peckinpaugh asked, "on Marston? Like maybe a blow to the head or something?" He knew there wasn't, but he'd turn any stone to gain a little more time. Late Sunday night and early Monday morning two murderees had come out of Clausen's overstuffed barrio, and for political reasons City Hall had set McVey's priorities. Marston had been third—which had pleased Peckinpaugh as far as it went; but it wasn't far enough.

"He hasn't recovered," McVey said. "And no—no crushed skull. And his wound still hasn't bled."

That had been the rub—aside from the time problem, the one of no bleeding. A couple of years ago Peckinpaugh had had a case in which a husband, feeling cheated by the natural death of a much-hated wife, had pumped a pair of post-mortem slugs into her chest. A sickie. Could this be another?

Now the trick was to keep the old man's body on ice and public interest in him at the lowest possible level. His death had been reported in Monday's *Press-Sentinel*, but there'd been nothing in the paper Tuesday, and Peckinpaugh hoped there'd be nothing today. Charley Marston had had few friends left in a town that had grown up almost unrecognizably around him. There'd been no inquiries, Bill had told him last night, about funeral arrangements. McVey had four refrigerated drawers in his new morgue, one still empty.

McVey laughed at whatever he was reading and Peckinpaugh backed out of the room. McVey had a morbid sense of humor: he often laughed at autopsy reports.

Peckinpaugh was late for Thursday night's game, which was not unusual, and the second baseman's father had guided the Blue Shirts through the first three innings. The score was now 14–12, which was not unusual either. The other team was at bat and, glancing down his half-empty bench, Peckinpaugh saw Bill Marston sitting at the end. They nodded. There had been a note on his desk at seven that evening to the effect

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that Marston would see him at the game. Now Marston moved next to him and said, *sotto voce*, "She called. About six-thirty. She bit. I'll see you after the game at my place, O.K.?"

"O.K." Peckinpaugh was watching a kid who looked about six foot two—an obvious ringer—drive in two runs with a Reggie-Jackson-type double to tie the score. He should check the kid's birth certificate.

It was the third time Peckinpaugh had been in Marston's house. The first had been on Sunday, the second on Tuesday, and the third now, each time at night. Sunday had produced nothing much, Tuesday Marston had produced the gun and outlined his theory that his sister had killed his uncle, and now he was telling Peckinpaugh about her phone call.

"Her voice was kinda thin and high, way off key," he said. "When she was seventeen, before she left town for good, she had a nervous breakdown. Her voice tonight had that same around-the-bend quality."

"What did she say?"

"She rambled around at first—about the weather, the store—and then she asked me if I'd seen Uncle Charley and I thought, 'Bingo!' "

"She must have been thinking you missed your usual Sunday-night visit," Peckinpaugh said, "and nobody'd found the body yet."

"Exactly. She must have been waiting for my call announcing the old man's murder since Monday morning. When it didn't come it began to drive her nuts, just like we thought it would. We've got no family lawyer and she's got no friends left in Clausen, so the call would have to come from me—or the police."

"She's too far away to get the local paper," Peckinpaugh said. "What did you tell her?"

"What we halfway worked out Tuesday night—that Charley was fine, that I'd seen him Sunday as usual and talked to him yesterday on the phone. Peck, she damn near moaned. Then finally she said, in this high, funny voice, 'Gee, that's great, Bill. I was worried about him.' And get this, Peck—she said she'd had an awful dream about him last week—that he was dead, that somebody broke into the house and shot him."

"Hmmm," Peckinpaugh said. "What do you take *that* to mean?"

"That the human mind," Marston answered, "is capable of any amount of self-deception. That one part will tell the rest of it anything it needs to survive."

"You mean she's flipped?"

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"Yes. She thinks the whole elaborate business she went through last Sunday was a product of her imagination. Either that or she has to admit she's insane. I'll bet you right now she's searching her house—or wherever she lives—for some concrete evidence that she actually came here and did what she did. And I'll bet she won't find it—not even a ticket stub or a cancelled check to the airline—because she would have bought the ticket for cash and burned the stubs when she got back in order to protect herself. So she's *got* to think it was all a very detailed and realistic dream—or else turn herself in to the booby hatch."

He sees this, Peckinpaugh was thinking, from the center of his universe, and I see it from mine. And they're different. If she really destroyed all evidence of her trip here last Sunday we'll have a tough time proving she was here, which leaves him a lot deeper in the soup than he thinks he is.

Marston felt the heat of his ardor wane. But he'd repeated the conversation with Francine as accurately and objectively as he could. Just as he'd reported on Tuesday night every detail of Sunday evening—except one—as honestly as he could. The one exception had been his switch of the stamps. And they were a prize in a contest between himself and his sister.

"Do you think," Peckinpaugh said carefully, "if I asked the Hannibal police to pick her up now on a charge of murder, that she's off-balance enough to confess?"

"Why should she?" Marston asked. "If she doesn't believe she did it—if she thinks it was just a dream—why should she?"

"Then you still think she'll try again next Sunday—or maybe the Sunday after that?" Peckinpaugh blanched. Two things had turned him Marston's way on Tuesday night, but neither one, he knew, would sway Wells, strictly a hard-evidence man. The first was the lack of bleeding from the old man's wound, and the second was the unlikely position of the bullet hole in the back of the chair he'd been sitting in. The two things together powerfully suggested that somebody had shot the old man *after* he'd died of a heart attack, and Peckinpaugh could see an advantage in that order of things only for the sister. As an heir, Marston would benefit no more one way than the other. In probate, dead is dead.

"It'll be this Sunday," Marston said with conviction. "I don't think she can hold out any longer, Peck. It'll be this Sunday. Count on it."

Cops hate to wait. Peckinpaugh would have preferred going to Hannibal

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by bus to pick up Marston's sister rather than wait—mute, nervous, and Wells-haunted—for her to come to him. But he was committed.

"Now," Peckinpaugh was saying to Bonny Johnson, "it's a waiting game." He had gone directly to her apartment from Marston's house. Bonny had been his fiancée for years. It was 11:30 P.M. and she was curled up in her robe on her couch in her living room. Her eyes were closed. Bonny taught Phys Ed and English at Clausen High during the school year, and did such unseemly things in summer as shoot golf in the low seventies.

"Naturally," she said, "you haven't told a bit of this to Lieutenant Wells."

"Naturally."

"What *have* you told him?"

"A tissue of half truths."

"I think it's cruel," she said.

"Huh? What's cruel?"

"She thinks she killed a man, and four days later she's told she didn't. I think that's cruel."

"She *didn't* kill him—technically. He died naturally, but she couldn't let it be that way. He had to be murdered or the elaborate frame she'd built for her brother wouldn't hang on the wall."

"My, how colorful! Anyway, what she thought is that he was dead. And now she's told he isn't."

"According to Marston she thinks she dreamed it all."

"Well, he was right about one thing, wasn't he? She *did* call."

"And he thinks she'll come back this Sunday and do it all over again."

"I imagine she will."

"Do you? Really?" Peckinpaugh would grasp at anything.

"Of course. The poor, tormented soul is being driven to it. Why don't you simply have her arrested, Peck? That would be kinder."

"Not enough evidence, and all of it circumstantial. There's a hell of a good case against Bill."

"But you're sure he didn't do it."

"Dead sure—forgive the expression."

"Peck."

"What?"

"Tell Wells."

"Oh, Bonny."

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"You know you should. You'll have to eventually. Get it over with."

"Why was I born?"

"Just blurt it out first thing in the morning." She uncoiled her stately, muscular legs; it always weakened him terribly. "Are you staying tonight, Peck? I don't tee off until ten tomorrow."

"When are you going to give up that idiot game?" he growled. "A grown woman beating a poor little ball to death with a stick!"

"Just because you never broke a hundred," she said sweetly. "Take off that silly-looking baseball hat."

Lieutenant Wells told Peckinpaugh to arrest both of them. He said he thought they'd planned the killing together, then had a falling-out, and were now trying to pin it on each other. "How, for instance," he asked, "do you *know* she said what he said she said on the phone last night?"

Peckinpaugh didn't. And he didn't mention his gut feeling. He hadn't mentioned a gut feeling to Wells in years. The only gut feeling Wells had any more was pain—recurrent ulcers. You give it all in police work, Wells had often said—hair, feet, stomach, teeth—eventually they take it all. But at least Peckinpaugh had confirmed through the phone company that Marston had received a call from Hannibal, Missouri, at 6:30 Thursday evening. Wells hadn't been impressed. It had been a bad session and Jeffrey found himself, uncharacteristically, looking forward to his vacation two weeks hence.

He expounded, doggedly, Marston's and his theory that Francine was psychologically programmed to repeat the murder on Sunday, two days from now. Wells, showing unexpected interest, told him to arrest her when she stepped off the plane.

It had gone on like that between them until Peckinpaugh finally wrested Wells's approval of the Sunday charade Marston had planned in exchange for what appeared to be his future, if not his life.

Francine's connecting flight from L.A. would arrive at 3:15, as it had last week. She would go from the airport to Bill's house to pick up the gun and then, probably most of the way by bus for anonymity's sake, to the old man's house, arriving around four. They had left the front door unlocked so she could enter at will. And then—probably the same as last week—she would go upstairs to the library, where they awaited her, Marston at the library table, Peckinpaugh in the utility closet inside the

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room. Through an inch-wide crack in the door he could see Marston at the table fifteen feet away, but with the door that nearly closed, it was soon claustrophobic.

He could not recall, in fact, being as disturbed on the job or about a job as he was that hot Sunday afternoon. He had shoved the door wide and was seated on one of the library chairs inside the closet. His suit jacket was hung on a hook behind him, his tie was undone, and he mopped his brow with a handkerchief.

Marston turned in his chair at the table and looked at him. Tense himself, he said it was four-fifteen—and if he'd faked an old man's voice to deliver that bit of news, he would have made a totally convincing septuagenarian. He was wearing a wig of white, wispy hair, his face was artfully aged with makeup, and his uncle's glasses, the magnifying lenses flipped down, spanned the bridge of his nose. The effect was striking and, Peckinpaugh supposed, might conceivably be worth the effort. Then Marston raised a cautionary finger and Peckinpaugh heard the distant click of the front door being closed.

Francine paused at the foot of the staircase and considered the chair-lift installation. She wavered on her feet. She was bone tired. It had been a long, hot drive, and maybe the chair was part of the dream. Or maybe it had been there seven years ago when she and George— But, no, it hadn't. She was sure of that. She thought.

She walked up the stairs slowly. At the top she removed the gun from her purse. It was good not to be burdened with the padding and the tight blonde wig she'd worn the week before. Or had she dreamed that too? She must have. She'd looked all over the house in Hannibal for them on Thursday night after talking with Bill, but hadn't found them.

She moved down the hall and looked through the open door at the right rear quadrant of Uncle Charley's head as he looked down at his stamps and suddenly she felt her world come right again. All that *had* been a dream, but this time, by God, with George's old army .45 automatic, the dream would become reality and she could get on with her life. And no palaver this time, no talking; she would just step in there and blow him to kingdom come.

Marston could see her legs from the knees down beneath the edge of the heavy lenses that covered his eyes, and he lifted his head slightly.

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She'd always had good legs. He lifted his head another notch and was about to take off the glasses and confront her when Peckinpaugh rushed out of his closet and tackled Francine onto the floor, one extremely loud and still echoing shot from her gun drilling a hole in the ceiling as he bore her down.

"She drove from Hannibal," Peckinpaugh told Lieutenant Wells on Monday morning. "Something like nineteen hundred miles in two and half days. Naturally we thought she'd repeat the trip by air and go through the same routine as last week."

"Including picking up the gun, which you had loaded with blanks, at Marston's house with that old key she had."

"Yes." Peckinpaugh had redeemed his old chair from across the street and was tilted comfortably back in it, one foot up on the edge of Wells's desk. "But instead she brought her ex-husband's gun with her."

"She confessed," Wells said.

"Yes."

"Miranda?"

"Yes, boss. I read her Miranda like I'm supposed to."

"Public defender?"

Peckinpaugh lowered his chair to the floor. "No. Her brother says he'll hire her the best legal talent his money can buy."

Wells looked at Peckinpaugh, his eyes bright. "You see! I told you they were in it together!"

"Aren't we all," Peckinpaugh said.

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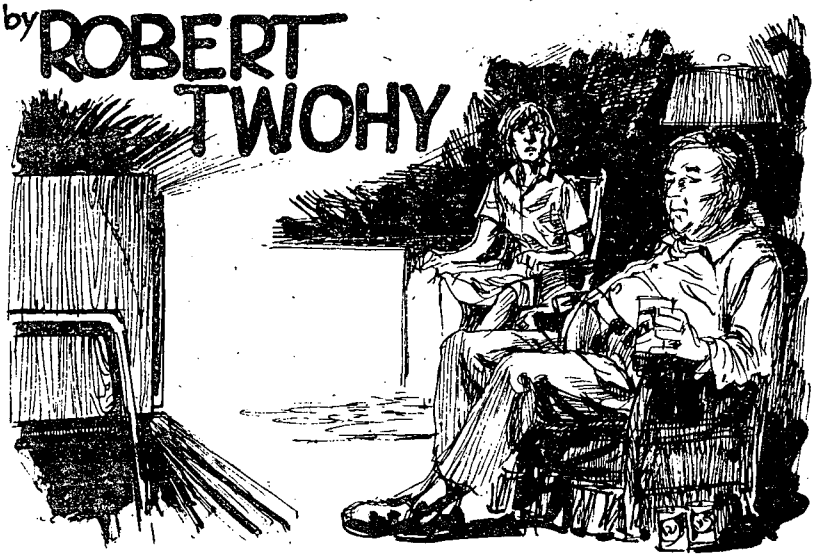
Simon cared more about Roger Strawback and J. J. Simpson than his own flesh and blood . . .

FLESH AND BLOOD

by ROBERT TWOHY



The Paussicks, Myra and Simon, sat in the living room of their rotten little house on Merdwood, the mangiest street in a low-grade neighborhood, watching John Chancellor. He was telling them about the economic outlook, and Myra nodded. She didn't understand anything he was saying but she liked his cool, calm voice.

Simon was looking at him and thinking it was time for another beer. He drank down the last inch of the one he held and put it on the rug

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alongside three other empties and, with some grunts, heaved out of his chair.

Myra switched her eyes and attention from John Chancellor to her husband. She had been more or less quiet during their Swanson frozen dinners and now felt it was time to communicate. Communicating with Simon on the nights he didn't stop at a bar after work was the most satisfaction she got from being married to him.

"I suppose you're going to get another beer."

He went into the kitchen to the refrigerator and did so. Then he came waddling back with it and let himself into his chair with more grunts and a few sighs.

"That's all you ever want to do. Drink beer and watch football. Lie on the rug all day Sunday with your beer, watching football."

John Chancellor switched from economics to the situation in the Middle East, which he seemed to feel wasn't too promising. But neither Paussick was paying any heed.

"You're getting a red nose and your stomach gets bigger and bigger. When did you last put on a clean pair of socks? You said you'd paint the kitchen fifteen years ago and you never did. If it isn't football on TV it's basketball or baseball or battles of the network stars, and all day Sunday you lie on the rug and drink beer. The garage is full of old machinery you bought at wrecking yards and none of it is worth anything, it's all junk. Everything you get is junk. You got that washer-dryer ten years ago and it never worked. Too cheap to buy anything decent.

"When did you last take a bath? I haven't had a decent dress in twenty-four years. Our trip to Disneyland was eighteen years ago and we've never gone anywhere since. You were too cheap to get reservations at the hotel—we had to stay with your drunken brother in the slums of Los Angeles and you and he were drunk the whole week and we had just the one day at Disneyland and never got back there. Basil cried all week and all the way home.

"When are you going to get a decent job? You were a cab driver all through our marriage until last year when your stomach got too big to fit behind the wheel, and now you're a dispatcher. I used to have nice friends but none of them have come around for years because you're too disgusting—you scratch and belch and don't know what to say to anyone who's not a drunken bum, and you sit around with your smelly shoes off. Are you getting up to get another beer?"

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In the kitchen his glazed eyes passed around the general clutter, across the sink full of dirty plates and cups and pans which had been there for several days and would stay until Myra got in the mood to clean them. Among them was a short, lean carving knife. His eyes slid over it, then swiveled back.

He had seen this knife several hundred times in their marriage and had never thought of it as anything other than the thing he used to hack away at the repulsive roasts or chickens Myra fixed now and then. But looking at it now he got a sudden startling vision—of the knife busily working on a task Simon had never imagined for it.

For three seconds he looked at it. Then he turned to the refrigerator and got his beer.

John Chancellor smiled at Myra and said in his calm, amiable way, "Good night."

She looked at Simon coming back with a fresh beer. "You seem ready to fall on your face. Your eyes are completely dead-looking and you look like you don't know what's going on. Your brain is three-quarters alcohol. An x-ray of it would make any decent person want to throw up."

He drank beer and watched her meager but sharp jaw waggle without pause above her thin, wrinkled neck.

From habit, Myra flipped the channel dial and onto the tube came prancing a game-show host, a toothy young man in a condition of suppressed hysteria because of all the excitement and fun he was about to purvey. This was the show Myra watched when Simon stayed late after work at some bar, as he usually did; this TV host made her think of the very special man who had never come into her life. But with Simon home this evening she wanted to give him full benefit of communication. She stretched her bony fingers and turned the sound low.

"I used to hand wash your socks and weeks would go by and you never changed them. I tried to make this a nice house and you promised to paint the kitchen and never did. You had a sensitive son who had normal children's problems and a father should be proud of his son but you weren't interested—when he needed you, you stopped communicating with him. He was six, and you refused to play ball with him any more, which he loved to play—you said he kept throwing the bat at your legs. Which was a drunken lie. The bat slipped. Small hands can't control a heavy bat."

Simon, leaning forward in the chair, his stomach swelling out almost

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to his knees, looked at her with no expression in his small glazed eyes.

"The time he broke the radio on your head he was trying to tell you—Dad! Don't lie there in a drunken stupor! I'm your son! Talk to me!"

The game-show host, with roguish laughter, shot his eyes around. It was clear he had just made a remark with scatological undertones.

"What kind of father would inform on his own son and bring the police in to conduct a massive search of his room?"

On that night, ten years ago, Simon had been under the car, fixing a leaky gas line, and Basil had attempted to knock over the jack.

"You told that lie about the jack to justify calling the police. Another drunken fantasy. A person who would think his own son was trying to drop a car on him must be depraved."

Simon had heard the muffled sound of the sledgehammer, wrapped in rags, thonking against the jack. What the sound meant had registered just in time, and he'd scrambled clear just as Basil's next swing got the job done and the car came crashing down.

"He denied it and I deny it. And the police knew you were drunk and that it had never happened. Then your hatefulness turned into an accusation that Basil was a junkie and a dope peddler, and you insisted the police search his room. Basil was crushed and heartsick by your betrayal. And what did you say when the police were leading him away? You said—in his hearing—you hoped he'd get life! But the police understood that the problem was you, not Basil—and what he needed wasn't punishment, but encouragement that he was a decent, worthwhile boy. They talked to him and he was back at school next day."

And back in business, Simon thought. The police had found only part of his inventory.

"You never tried to understand him. You just wanted to drink beer and watch football. You cared more about Roger Strawback and J. J. Simpson than your own flesh and blood. Basil turned to dope in the first place in despair at your negative attitude. It's no wonder he was a grown man before he started to find himself, realize his inner spiritual qualities."

Two years ago Basil had robbed a liquor store, drilling an aged clerk in the process. His purpose was to acquire funds to enable him to travel to Asia, where he intended to join a monastery and spend the rest of his days as a mendicant friar, spreading love and enlightenment. This was what the young public defender told the prosecutor and the judge at the

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plea-bargaining session. But Basil had got hold of some prime dust in jail (Simon had heard this later from a relative of someone who was then also incarcerated) and, at the descending stage of his high, just as his defender finished his emotional appeal, Basil had gone off on a laughing jag, which infuriated the judge, who liked things stately and decorous—and the plea bargain was off. Basil got a fast trial and five years—the liquor-store clerk, though paralyzed, having survived.

Having this recollection flash on him in two seconds, Simon returned to a consideration of Myra's neck, sinewy but spindly under the waggling jaw.

"You were a terrible father and you still are. When Basil gets out, will you give him any support, any of the fatherly love he's entitled to? You will not! He'll ask for help, and you won't raise a finger."

Not true. Simon *would* raise a finger.

"You have a steady job and a regular income but it's all for you—nothing for your son, nothing for your wife. A washer-dryer that never worked, and you never painted the kitchen. All that stuff in the garage is worthless. Are you getting *another* beer?"

He had set down his empty can and, grunting, gotten up.

"You look and sound like a pig. You smell like a pig. When are you going to change your socks?"

The participants in the game show went into raptures as the host said something so loaded with libidinous innuendo that Voltaire himself would have felt outclassed.

"What are you reaching in your back pocket for?"

Glee swept the audience like a contagion, and the cameras panned around to reveal the prevailing ecstasy.

"Why are you standing over me? What are you holding behind your back? Why are you looking at my neck? Why are your eyes so much like a pig's? They're shiny and flat—you're breathing funny. What's got into you? What—"

The host showed his wonderful teeth in a bewitching, devilish smile, not observed in the rotten little house on Merdwood Street because, though Myra had fallen silent, she wasn't watching the tube. Nor was Simon. He had gone into the kitchen and rinsed his hands and the implement—and now was turning to the refrigerator to get another beer.

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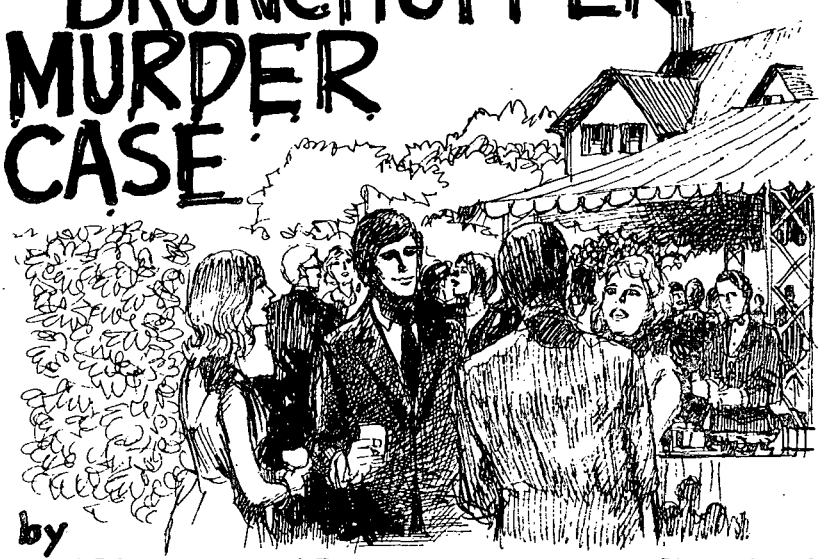
In tracing disease, you have to be a combination of Sherlock Holmes and *Dr. Watson . . .*

THE BRUNCHUPPER MURDER CASE



by THEODORE S. DRACHMAN

Archie Sims, my director of environmental health, was in my office discussing the suspension notice we'd just slapped on a large restaurant and catering service, when the phone rang. It was Angie Feldschuh, the executive secretary of the Spencer County Council on the Arts, and a friend of Betty's and mine. She didn't sound too friendly though. Upset and angry would be closer. "Johnny Mack, do you know what you and your department have done to us?"

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"Drop a hint, Angie," I said. "I don't guess too well on Fridays. Especially toward closing time."

"Don't tell me you've forgotten about Sunday, Doctor. Or did you do it because you wanted the twenty-four dollars back that Betty sent us for your two tickets to the annual brunchupper that keeps our fund-raising alive?"

"Brunchupper" was a word Angie coined about five years ago to describe the late-Sunday-afternoon picnic-type get-together her organization held every August. It was an important social event in our rural two-county health district. The word had caught on because the food was always good and some people didn't eat any other meal that day in anticipation.

I got it. It felt as if a piece of our space junk had fallen on me, instead of Down Under or in the Pacific. "My God, Angie! I'd forgotten. You were going to have it at Risotto's. It's the only place with enough catering and outside facilities in the county. Well, I'm sorry—I had to close it. Too many violations of the restaurant code. Seven of the big eight and forty-two out of forty-six total. I'm afraid you'll have to cancel the event and refund the money."

She was close to tears. "I can't, Johnny. We don't *have* the money. We sent Mischa Landauer a two-thousand-dollar retainer for the October concert. Please revoke the order. Please!"

"I can't," I said. "It's legal, it's proper, and it's gone to the State. If anybody got sick—and they have a septic tank that acts like it has a license to pollute—the county would be liable. I can't let that happen."

She hung up. I felt like a well intentioned heel, and I wasn't relishing what Betty would say when I got home. I love her very much but she has a tongue like an icepick when she gets riled.

Well, I'd brazen it out. My job came first. I was paid to protect the health of the public.

False alarm. Betty was humming in the kitchen when I gingerly pushed open the front door. Betty has a tin ear, but she never hums when she's angry and if she was in the kitchen this early it meant she was fixing something nice for supper—another good sign. But maybe Angie hadn't called her yet. Storm clouds might break over me yet.

Wrong again. Angie *had* called. Betty was on the Council's board of directors and had to be kept informed. But—wonder of wonders —every-

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thing was miraculously all right. Another board member, Eugene Ramsey, had saved the day. We'd have to notify everyone and put an item in the Saturday *Daily Press and Guardian* and an announcement over WSPS that the location had been changed. Instead of at Risotto's, the party would be held at the Ramsey estate, Eugene's grandfather's place.

It would be catered by a fully licensed and approved Elmira service. Because of the short notice and the distance involved, there wouldn't be hot food, but everything would be first class and delicious. You could depend on Albright's for that.

Best of all, Betty said, Eugene's grandfather would pick up the tab—the Council on the Arts could keep all the profits. It would be in the black for the first time in five years. Eugene was a doll. And so was I for making it all possible.

About Eugene: in Spencer City, the county seat of the larger of the two counties under my jurisdiction, he was the closest thing to a mystery man we had. He'd been born here, out of wedlock, to industrialist Perry Ramsey's seventeen-year-old daughter. Her parents had taken her in, but her mother had made her so miserable that she had left with the baby when he was four months old—and had died out of state some years later. Eugene had shown up again two years ago and moved in with his grandfather, who was now alone except for an old couple who had worked for him for forty years.

Eugene didn't do much except some volunteer work at the hospital and a little bookkeeping and management of the house for his grandfather. Perry had retired and sold his factories and shipyards, but was still quite active at eighty-four.

It was a surprise that Eugene had come to the rescue of the Arts Council in that way. He was an inactive member and didn't bother much with any social or cultural organizations in either county. His only really active public interest was in being a volunteer fireman, mostly playing cards at the firehouse or climbing on roofs to clean chimneys. He usually lost at cards, but not large amounts—we don't play for big stakes around here; most of us don't have that kind of money.

On Sunday I was delayed in getting to the party. Betty went ahead because she was on the arrangements committee. We had been ready to leave when Dr. Willard Ball phoned. He wanted a consultation on a possible tetanus in an eight-year-old boy who'd stepped on a nail and

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seemed to have lockjaw. It turned out that the boy had refused to open his mouth because he had an all-day sucker in it. His mother had told him never to eat them. He was fine except for a slight infection and the trismus disappeared when we made him spit out the candy.

Ball was embarrassed—he's really a good internist, though he talks like a country bumpkin in a bad play—but I told him to forget it. We all make similar mistakes—and calling me was a sensible bit of insurance.

I had to park nearly an eighth of a mile from the main gate at the Ramsey estate because there were so many cars. This was obviously going to be the most successful brunchupper they'd ever had, and I knew why. People were curious to see the Ramsey place. Old Perry had lived there for years after his wife died with only the aging Phil and Marian Vickers to look after him, and nothing much had seemed to change when Eugene reappeared from out of nowhere and moved in. This festivity would be talked about for a long time.

In spite of the crowds of people, many of whom I knew, and the numerous tables stacked with appetizing food and refreshments and staffed by elegant servers—besides being sanitary, Albright's knows how to do things right—I took the time to explore the beautiful estate old Perry had been keeping all these years. Originally it had been landscaped by a firm from outside the area, the same Westchester outfit that had done Pocantico Hills, and it was kept up by an Ithaca firm that manicured the lawns, pruned the trees, cleaned the artificial canals, repaired and maintained the Venetian bridges and footwalks, and did all the many other showplace-keeping chores.

I couldn't help wondering why Perry bothered to keep up the expensive appearance of an estate that hardly anyone ever saw. The rise toward the main house had been skillfully landscaped with Japanese rock gardens, grottoes, arbored enclosures, and flower-bordered flats where buffet tables had been placed. Up below the big house was the main table and reception area.

Betty and the other members of the committee were up there, and I worked my way to them slowly, loading my plate and filling my glass as I went.

Albright's had a liveried server at each table and since each table featured only one item, it was like winding my way through an extended smorgasbord. I'd stop, taste the aged cheese, salami, or pickled herring,

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pick up a glass of wine, champagne, or beer, and meet someone I knew, falling usually into the same conversation. Why did old Ramsey break down and do it? What made Eugene so all-fired public-spirited?

I had made my way two-thirds of the distance up the hill and was savoring chianti that tasted good enough to have been part of the original batch from Tuscany when my practiced ear caught a significant change in the atmosphere. I've been in enough emergency situations in wartime and peacetime to know that sound can be read like sheet music. Hearing and interpreting it properly can sometimes mean the difference between life and death. Before there had been a loud, conversational buzz, and you'd had to speak up and listen sharply to communicate. Now there was a tone of crisis descending from above and mingling with the cocktail-party hum below. Obviously something unpleasant was happening higher up, and most of us on the lower levels didn't know about it yet.

I looked up. On the flat lawn in front of the magnificent main house near the large table of refreshments, a swelling knot of people had gathered and was growing thicker. Those in front seemed to be bending down over something. I knew what that meant—someone had collapsed or been hurt.

The crowd knew me and made way. On the ground was old Perry Ramsey. He wasn't completely unconscious, but both his legs were jerking spasmodically, froth flecked his lips, and his eyes were rolled so far back I couldn't see the pupils. His nephew Eugene was standing next to him with elderly Phil and Marian Vickers, the housekeeping couple, staring helplessly, obviously not knowing what to do. Their distress was plain.

Eugene said, "Help him, Doctor!" Phil looked at me pleadingly. You could see he loved the old man. They'd been together a long time.

I bent over Ramsey and loosened his tight collar and shirt. When I felt his pulse I nearly keeled over myself. At his age and with these symptoms, you could bet it was an impending cerebrovascular accident. The wrist beats, although slow, felt like a jackhammer ripping into a concrete wall. I put my hand inside his shirt, pulling the old man's clutching hand away, and palpated the left side of his chest. What I felt confirmed my near certainty of what I was dealing with. What I couldn't know was the precipitating factor.

I straightened up. "Call an ambulance," I told Phil. "But it'll take half

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an hour to get here, so I'm going to get my car and drive up the hill as close as I can. My medical bag's in it."

"I'll get it for you, Doctor," Eugene said. "I was on the track team at college and still run every day. It'll be quicker than driving. You stay here and do what you can for him."

I handed him my keys, described my car, and told him my license number. He took off at a fast clip. I felt sure I had what was needed. Even though I'm a health officer and don't see patients every day, my office is in a large public building and I get a fair number of emergencies: acute coronaries, minor accidents, severe nosebleeds, epileptic seizures. Since the hospital is outside town, people often think of calling me first. I'd gotten into the habit of taking my bag with me wherever I went. Besides routine medications, I always carry vials with no less than 300 units of insulin ready for injection, a hard lesson learned when I lost a coma case out in the country and 100 units hadn't been enough.

Marian Vickers said, "He was feeling so good, Doctor! He ate everything and was joking and talking to everybody. Then suddenly he stopped and said, 'I have a headache,' and he grabbed his chest and fell over."

Eugene reappeared, out of breath, my bag in his hand.

I tore it open and searched for regitine in a 5 mg. injectable vial. I hadn't checked in over a year but it had to be there and I was sure the expiration date hadn't been reached yet. But somehow it wasn't there. There was another medication I could use. Diazoxide in a 300 mg. injectable bolus, but it wasn't there either. I was licked. I didn't dare try anything else—not without knowing more about Ramsey's history. I checked his blood pressure. It was too high to measure.

Eugene and the Vickerses were looking at me. I shook my head. "I haven't got what I need. We'll have to wait for the ambulance."

When the ambulance finally arrived, I'd already tried cardio-pulmonary resuscitation but it was no use. Perry Ramsey was dead.

I went back to my Sunday-deserted office, pulled down the shades, put my feet on the desk, and tried to sort things out.

After about ten minutes a little bell rang inside my skull. There was no time to lose. I went to the locked medicine cabinet, opened it, took out two small objects, and made a phone call. Then I waited on the line till the other party came back, told me he'd found two others where I'd suggested he look, and said he'd be right over. In the meantime, I made

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a second phone call, to an unlisted number. I got the party I wanted and the information I expected.

My visitor arrived. I gave him the items I'd taken out of the cabinet, told him what I wanted done, and cautioned him not to tell anyone about it. After he left I locked up what he'd brought me and went home. Much more had to be done, but it involved travel and I couldn't start today.

When I was a young intern with the New York State Department of Health, I did an epidemiological investigation of a food-poisoning outbreak that had occurred following a dinner at an Albany hotel. It was a reunion of priests and seminarians from all over the state, and they had all returned to their diverse parishes and seminaries before becoming ill. In order to record the data on who had eaten what and the character and occurrence of symptoms, I'd had to travel all over the state to interview the patients.

It was an interesting and successful study. The offending organism turned out to be *Salmonella derby*—out of all the hundreds of known *Salmonellas*—and this was the first time it had been implicated in an outbreak since it was first discovered in 1925 in Derby, England.

Now I would have to travel again on an investigation, one place leading to another—to Albany, to Olean, to Elmira, to Batavia in the western part of the state, then Elmira again. It was all deadly serious, but a break from the usual routines, and I've always liked detective work—in tracing diseases you have to be a combination of Sherlock Holmes *and* Dr. Watson, and even sometimes Perry Mason.

By Friday my research was complete. As it happened, that was the day of the funeral. It wasn't held at the Presbyterian Church, which the old man had only nominally belonged to, but at his estate. Like the brunchupper, it was well attended, largely by people who wanted to see the estate. Burial was on the grounds, as requested in the will.

The will gave the residual to Eugene, as expected, but there was a generous legacy to the Vickerses. Two distant counsins from God-knows-where, middle-aged men, appeared with hope in their eyes, but they might as well have stayed home. They weren't even mentioned or given a small bequest to keep them from trying to break the will. But, as it turned out, they may have been lucky after all.

Spencer City Chief of Police Larson arrived as the last of the guests were leaving. The Chief had been what he called a "harness bull," or

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foot patrolman, for twenty years and claimed it had ruined his arches. He always carried a camp chair with him and sat in it if a conversation lasted more than two minutes. The only people left were myself, the Vickerses, and Eugene Ramsey. Larson lumbered over to Eugene and read him his rights. He'd received the fingerprint report from Washington from the prints I'd sent over on Monday.

I'll say this for Eugene—or Harry, which is his real name—he didn't deny anything or look or act indignant. But he was incredulous that anyone could have figured out he'd done it and demanded to know how.

That was my cue. After I'd finished, produced my evidence, had Phil Vickers tell his part in it, and mentioned what I'd learned from Ramsey's doctor, Pete Shawn, and his lawyer, Hugh Struthers, he admitted everything.

The Chief put handcuffs on him and took him away. It was murder one—premeditated.

"I fixed your favorite dish, darling," Betty said. "Boiled beef with horseradish sauce. But you don't get dinner till you tell me how you figured it out. Eugene was a logical suspect; but why would he want to kill the old man when he was his principal beneficiary?"

"That was the easy part. Ramsey's lawyer confirmed my surmise that Perry was changing his will and cutting Eugene out. He had suspicions about him that were being checked out, and there were phone extensions in the house that were perfect for eavesdropping.

"My concern was why the old man should die like that, a violent, fulminating, malignant hypertension suddenly causing a fatal stroke. Of course it could have happened at a party in full view of many people by coincidence—or it could have been planned.

"Pretty soon it hit me that it was fishy that neither the regitine ampoule I was sure I had in my bag was there, nor was the diazoxide bolus I was quite sure I had. Still, for anyone to have removed them purposely would have implied a pretty technical knowledge of medicine plus a diagnosis of hypertensive crisis I'd barely made myself. I couldn't be sure. It needed verification.

"Some of that came rather quickly. I went to the medicine cabinet and took out my spares of the two drugs, identical to the ones I'd thought I had in the bag. I put an inconspicuous mark on the two vials, then called the Ramsey home. I got Phil Vickers on the phone and asked him where

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Eugene was. Fortunately, he was in the swimming pool behind the main house. I asked Phil to rummage in the clothing Eugene had been wearing and see if he could find two small medicine vials. If they were there, he was to handle them with gloves.

"Phil put down the phone and returned in a minute. He'd found both in Eugene's pants pocket. I told him to leave them there and come right over. I didn't want to take a chance on Eugene coming back from his swim and finding them gone. When Phil arrived, I explained the possibilities, gave him the other two vials, and asked him to substitute them for the ones he'd found and return the originals to me, which he did. They were mine, from my medical bag. I dusted them and sent them to Chief Larson for fingerprint identification. As far as I was concerned that clinched it, but there was more I could do to make a solid case.

"I made another phone call. Doctors don't like to be bothered on weekends, but I have Pete Shawn's unlisted number. He'd been the old man's physician and he told me he'd been treating him for hypertension with Eutonyl, which, despite its drawbacks, was the only antitensive that had worked. That was a tremendous clue, but it still wasn't enough."

"What did you do next?"

"I waited until Chief Larson had the phone report on the fingerprints from Washington. The full written résumé only came today. They belonged to a man with a record for petty theft, drug pushing, and confidence swindles whose name was Harry Greenlow. According to the files, Greenlow also qualified as an R.N., but they didn't say where. They also had prints on Eugene Ramsey, but he didn't have a record. That was when I left on my travels."

"I was upset with you for going away," Betty said. "Why so mysterious? Why couldn't you tell me what you were doing?"

"Pride," I confessed. "I wanted to be able to tell you about it when it was solved. Anyway, the first place I went was Albany—the New York State Education Department. It didn't take long to find out Harry Greenlow had gone to the Olean General Hospital School of Nursing, which was also where Eugene Ramsey had gone. They received their R.N. degrees the same year. They had to have known each other—two men in the same class in nurses' training—but Eugene Ramsey's license had lapsed. He had died later—and Harry must have known."

"It gets more fascinating by the minute."

"I dug further and found that both men had gone to Elmira to work

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at St. Joseph's Hospital. It's a large hospital, 287 beds. That was where Eugene Ramsey—the genuine one—had died, of septicemia from a patient. But he had told his friend about his rich grandfather in Spencer City, and Harry admitted to us that he appropriated some documents that proved the relationship. Eugene had never intended to use them. His mother had made him promise never to exploit the relationship.

"Harry must have mulled over the prospect of exploiting the situation for a while. He changed jobs again. This time he went to Batavia, to Genesee Memorial Hospital. It's rather small, only 145 beds. When I followed his trail there and received permission to search their records, I found something very interesting—which I'll get to shortly!"

"Oh, my," Betty murmured impatiently.

"I then visited Albright's which had catered the brunchupper and saw a copy of the original order Harry had placed for the kinds of food to be served. And that clinched it beyond any doubt."

"Nobody else got sick, sweetheart! How did perfectly good food have anything to do with the old man's death?"

"They had been prepared to serve a succession of hot dishes with only a couple of bland appetizers. Harry vetoed that. He insisted on a delicatessen type of cold supper. He specifically ordered aged cheeses, pickled herring, vintage Chianti, beer, figs, chicken-liver paté, and cold beans. He was playing it safe. There were other items, of course, but those were the important ones. Everything was delicious—but the choice of food killed the old man, as Harry had known it would. I proved that with a final piece of evidence, the records from the Batavia Hospital. They showed that Harry had been the nurse on a similar fatal case. He had been given a practical demonstration on the effects of certain foods on people who are taking MAO inhibitors."

"You've lost me," Betty said.

"There's a body enzyme, monoamine oxidase—it has the power to inactivate what are called pressor amines, particularly tyramine, which dramatically raise blood pressure. When a patient is taking an MAO inhibitor it prevents the enzyme from working and pressors send the pressure through the roof because there's nothing to stop them. A hypertensive crisis develops—which in an old, sick man would be surely fatal. Eutonyl, which Perry was on, is an MAO inhibitor. Dr. Shawn had given him a list of foods to stay away from, which he probably never looked at, or forgot about. Harry was counting on that. He knew Perry

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loved that kind of food, which they usually never kept at home. The aged cheese, the wine, the herring, the beer and figs all contain tyramine which raises blood pressure by releasing norepinephrine from its binding sites. The special order for cold beans was particularly diabolical. They contain DOPA, which is not tyramine but has a similar effect. When the old man ate that he didn't have a chance. Correction—he did have one chance, but Harry took that one away from him by latching onto my regitine and diazoxide."

"And you knew Harry had taken them?"

"I knew it," I said grimly, "as soon as Phil Vickers found them in his pants pocket and brought them to me. And then I replaced them with duplicates with my mark on them, to see what would happen."

"What did?"

"Harry found them in his trousers, thought they were the originals, and threw them away, never suspecting they'd be found. But Phil was watching for that, retrieved them from the trash, and brought them to me. They'll be Exhibit I at the trial."

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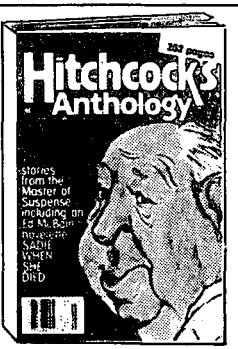

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Benjy swore he would return with the earrings on Saturday . . .

TELL ME TRUE

by JEAN DARLING

Hand in hand they wandered along the Dublin quays, past churches, coal yards, and warehouses. The moon shimmered the wide blackness of the River Liffey rising to the fullness of her tide. Midnight bells sounded from cargo ships where shadowy figures changed the watch.

"It's late, I'd best be off home now," she said, making no move to leave. "You're sure it *is* all right and it's not angry you are about the—"

"Shush!" He laid gentle fingers against her lips. "Don't be botherin'

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with foolish notions so." His warm voice brought a small contented sigh from the rosy girl with hair piled fashionably atop her head.

"And we'll be wed before—before time?"

"We will o' course, Mary me darlin'. Let me see, it's comin' on for September now. Sure an' we could be married the first day of January."

"Not till January! Ah, no, Benjy—everyone'll know by then! Besides, the number thirteen is unlucky, you know." Her small face was turned up toward his, a frown marring the smoothness of her brow.

"I just thought you'd like to be startin' the New Year as Mrs. Benjy Lynch. Nineteen hundred and thirteen isn't like the number thirteen all by itself, you know." The girl's jaw jutted into superstitious stubbornness. "Would you ever be lookin' at the face on her!" Benjy laughed. "Sure an' if it'll make you happy— will October be after suitin' your ladyship?" He caught her close and they pledged themselves with a kiss.

"It must have been the earrings brought me luck," Mary said from beneath his chin, touching the fall of tiny diamonds twinkling in the gaslight from the street lamp. "I wanted to be so beautiful you wouldn't be sendin' me away when I told you. And there they were just lyin' on Madam's dressing table where she'd left—"

"Let me see one of them here in me hand."

"Ah, *no*, Benjy! I wouldn't dare take them off for fear o' losin' one!"

"I didn't say the two o' them. Just the one will do." After a moment the girl unscrewed an earring, pulled it from her earlobe, and laid it on the flat of Benjy's demanding hand. There, a quick, sly pressure of his thumb snapped the slender gold post from the setting. "It's broken," he said.

"Oh, Holy Mary Mother o' God, what'll I do?" Mary cried. "The Madam will be movin' back from Bray on Monday. She'll be lookin' for them high and low, she will!"

"You'd think she'd be more careful, not be leavin' valuable jewelry lyin' around." The glitter of his eyes rivaled that of the small hard gems. "Here now, give me the other so the jeweler can fix the broken one to match it. You'll have them both back Saturday good as new—" He studied her face. "Ah, Mary, don't you trust me? I'll have them back to you on Saturday. On my mother's head I swear." When the superstitious Mary objected to his making such an oath, he laughed and swore on his trusty right hand. The girl captured his brawny fist in her two small ones and kissed the knuckles one by one.

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"Don't be swearin' on anything, Benjy Lynch, just tell me true and I'll believe you." And, unscrewing the other earring, she gave it to him.

Taking it, Benjy put both earrings in his pocket, linked Mary's arm, and they went on their way, leaving the ships, some to sail with the tide for exotic ports, some to slumber quietly until the morrow.

Saturday dawned awash with fine, soft rain that continued into the afternoon, chilling Mary O'Sullivan as she waited on the quay. She wished she'd worn a shawl over her high-necked cotton frock. The weather had turned cold the past week, filling her with foreboding. The busy avenues of the river and the cobbled quay held no interest for her. She saw nothing but empty distance which she hoped would at any moment be broken by the hurrying figure of her Benjy. Coalmen black with dust shuffled past her, their shoulders bent beneath ten stone weight of slack. Bells chimed in the wheelhouse of the ship creaking directly in front of her.

Benjy was an hour late.

Mary paced nervously back and forth, heedless of the grime greying the bottom of the long pale skirt she had ironed so carefully that morning. "An hour late," she said out loud. "Ah, Benjy, how could you?" And she recalled the earnest drawing together of his brows as he promised to return the earrings on Saturday.

Hurt at his lateness became anger, then worry that he might have fallen ill. That would explain why he hadn't come. But if he were ill he would need her to care for him! Clutching at this straw, she turned her steps toward the flats near the Gas Works where Benjy rented an attic room.

Mary's instinct was only partially correct. Benjy did lie sprawled on his unmade bed—but not for illness' sake. Realizing the girl eventually would try to ferret him out, Benjy had that morning at breakfast told his landlady he was going away for the day. As soon as the deaf old woman had gone back to the kitchen, he had sneaked up to the safety of his room.

Around half-past four the sound of Mary's light step on the cobblestones below sent him scuttling crabwise to the window, where he could see the flat brim of her straw hat directly below. She was knocking at the street door. After the usual scraping squeak, he heard the old woman

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tell her Benjy was gone for the day. The door slammed shut and Mary walked away, the rhythm of her footsteps broken by disappointment.

Benjy flopped back down on the bed, sighing with relief. He felt remorse, but the situation had gotten out of hand. Seeing Mary again would only complicate matters. There was no way he could return the earrings. The fiver he'd sold them for had been lost on the races. And at twenty-five, Benjy Lynch had no desire to settle into the husband-father mold—not when there were three other pretty little maids, two kitchen and one tweeney, to feed and cosset him.

As a single man it was easy to flutter any girl's heart when astride his big shining bicycle with the delivery basket on the front. Round and round he would pedal—Leeson Street, Merrion Square, Fitzwilliam Square, Baggot Street—handing in packages of rashers and sausages, ham and gammon steaks from Hornby, the pork butcher, at the kitchen doors, the white coat and peaked cap framing the dark curls tumbling above his eyes as big and blue as Killarney's lakes. (Occasionally, the Kerry sibilance broke through the acquired Dublin accent to betray his country origin.) Few women could resist his charm, including occasionally the lady of the house. How could all this be sacrificed for marriage with Mary O'Sullivan?

For the next week or so, Benjy avoided the big house on Leeson Street, sending the pimply-faced sweeper boy on foot with the orders. Then one day when the boy returned to the shop he mentioned that there was a new girl in slender Mary O'Sullivan's place. So Benjy went pedaling back with a smile and a bit of a joke for the cook. Inside a month, Nora, the new girl, was squeezing through the laundry-room window to walk the midnight quays with Benjy Lynch. He probed gently but Nora could tell him nothing about her predecessor except, "She upped and went, sure she did, without a word so." She went on to tell him that Mary had left all her clothes behind and had six months' wages owed to her.

And then a mention on the front page of the evening paper sent him scurrying to the police station. "This girl," he said to the constable behind the counter, indicating the notice requesting public help in identifying a young woman fished from the River Liffey several days before. "This girl—I was wonderin' if she was after bein' me sister, Moira." So the policeman took the lad with the thick Kerry accent to see the dead girl.

"Thanks be to God!" Benjy almost shouted his relief. "I never saw her before in me life." The dark hair falling away from the face disfigured by

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spoil and bloat told him the dead girl was not Mary O'Sullivan.

"Not a pretty sight, lad. She must have been in the water for a month or more. Dublin is a rough place these days. Far too many country girls come to grief." The policeman sighed. He was glad the unfortunate girl wasn't this nice lad's sister. "Come—you could use a cup of tea to wash away the shock of seeing that unfortunate creature, God rest her soul."

To give Benjy credit, he was shocked at seeing death from drowning, but the shock was not untinged with satisfaction that the threat to his freedom had not been fished out of the Liffey. He hoped Mary never would be, that the tide had carried her body out to sea long since. He hadn't wanted to kill Mary O'Sullivan—actually, it had been an accident—but try telling that to the police.

It had been her fault, really. She'd hung around the pub until closing time and followed him, shouting and roaring that he'd promised to marry her. "Ah, Benjy Lynch, you've *got* to marry me—it's disgraced I am! Whatever will I do?" She'd covered her face with her hands. "Where can I go if you don't marry me?" she'd sobbed.

It was then he'd stopped and gone to her. "Shush, Mary me love—wait till the lads pass. This is not to be talked of in public," he'd said, holding her close and stroking her soft blonde hair. He drew her into a doorway, swearing he intended to marry her, that he couldn't live without her. It was only lack of money that was keeping him from rushing down to the church to post the banns. He suggested she go to the gypsy woman—she would help Mary as she'd helped others in a similar dilemma. It wasn't as though they wouldn't have plenty of children after they were married.

But his suggestion fell on horrified ears. Mary's voice rose high in protest that he should suggest her committing a mortal sin. The easiest way to silence her had been to press his hands against her mouth and neck. Too much pressure, as it turned out. Sweat sprang out like gooseflesh whenever he thought of the heart-pounding terror he had felt, realizing she was dead and carrying her limp body to the quay. Eyes could have been watching behind every curtain—any late-night stroller could have seen him lower her into the River Liffey.

Benjy Lynch had hardly resettled into his freewheeling style of life when a telegram arrived from his parish priest back in County Kerry telling him his mother was dying. He immediately notified his boss, Hornby the pork butcher, abandoned his bicycle, the basket filled with

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undelivered orders, in front of the shop, and ran to catch the westbound train to Kerry.

The station was crowded with homeward-bound day trippers, in Dublin for the horse races, who pushed and shoved their way onto the platform like uncaged animals. Benjy felt himself caught up in the rush that surged toward the incoming and outgoing trains. The group surrounding him was drunk and arguing, shouting obscenities. A train whistled shrilly as it puffed into the station. Helplessly centered in the brawl, Benjy lost his footing—and felt himself pulled into a pool of blinding pain.

"I see you've decided to wake up," a young nurse said, plumping the pillow beneath his head. A high grey ceiling arched above her. "And before you're after askin' where you are, I'll tell you. You're in St. Patrick's Ward in Dr. Steevens' Hospital." She adjusted a pin fastening the white cap to her dark pompadour.

"Dr. Steevens'?" Benjy tried to lift himself.

The nurse checked him with a flat palm against his chest. "It's your pulse I'm wantin' at the moment." She held his wrist, her eyes cast down at the watch pinned to her starched front.

Relaxing, Benjy looked around at the occupied beds ranged along the walls. "You'd think you lads'd learn not to take too much drink, but you're all the same—the lot o' you. First the drink, then the brawl, and you end up in the hospital." She touched his curls sympathetically, then smoothed the sheet across his chest before moving on to the patient in the next bed.

"But, Sister," Benjy said, his voice rising with his fear. "It wasn't the drink, I swear—"

"Hush—you'll wake the whole hospital!" the nurse said, hurrying back to his side.

"I was on me way home. Me Mum is dying!" Tears slid over the bridge of his nose. "Sure I wouldn't be drinkin' on the way to me Mum's death-bed, I swear it on my good right hand!"

As he went to hold up his arm, Benjy saw Mary O'Sullivan's face lean close to kiss the knuckles of his brawny fist one by one. "Don't be swearin' on anything, Benjy Lynch, just tell me true," she had said. The vision of her face blurred, but the words she had spoken echoed in his ears while his eyes searched the void where his right arm should have been.

And he began to scream and scream and scream—

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Arnie was confident he'd made the right match . . .

THE HUNDRED-THOUSAND-DOLLAR WALL

by MARK TOWNLEY

Arnie Dean had never heard of the theory of Synchronicity propounded by the great Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung, but he believed in it nonetheless. Jung used the term "synchronicity" to describe what he interpreted as "meaningful coincidences." Arnie called such things "matches," and he'd used them often to his advantage.

Like the time he tripped over a little old lady's umbrella in the aisle of the A&P and ten minutes later noted in the paper that a long shot

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named Tripping Lady was running in the fourth at Arlington. He bet fifty to win and collected nearly a thousand dollars.

Then there was the morning he watched the postman deliver two air-mail letters to his landlady—one from Hamilton, Bermuda, the other from Hamilton, Ontario. There was neither a horse nor a jockey that sounded anything like that, but at an open house at the Legion that night Arnie had danced with a pretty girl from out of town whose name turned out to be Hamilton. Arnie had known in a flash that she would spend the night with him, and he was right.

These were the best examples of matches in the wiry young redhead's life, but there were enough others to keep him hoping he'd come upon a really spectacular one again.

He did—or seemed to—one Monday in late October, a few weeks after he was laid off from his job at the tractor plant which was the city's largest employer. To say that Arnie was running low on funds was casting a rosy glow on it. He owed money to his landlady, his brother-in-law, and several others he could—but chose not to—think of. In other words, he was more than ready for one of Dr. Jung's meaningful coincidences —preferably one that might lead him to some financial reward.

The first half of this match came as he fidgeted with a throbbing molar in a downtown dentist's waiting room. It was an emergency visit and the dentist was unknown to him. After reassuring himself as to the man's credentials by perusing the fine print of the diploma on the wall, Arnie looked for something to distract him from his misery. He found it in one of the outdated news magazines on the table. The article that snared his attention was titled "The Big, Big Business of Art Theft."

As Arnie skimmed the first page, the figure of fifty million dollars leapt out at him. This was the estimated value of the art stolen in the United States alone during a single recent year. By then he was hooked.

Reading more carefully, he learned that the missing works included a Rembrandt valued at one million, three Cézannes insured for two million, and a Picasso with an estimated resale value of $200,000. All had vanished without a clue from various museums and private collections.

Arnie had just reached a paragraph mentioning the suspected involvement of organized crime when the receptionist called his name. As she turned back to her desk, Arnie slipped the magazine inside his windbreaker and then, hanging it up, he went into the room with the dental chair.

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The second half of the match came a couple of hours later when the Novocain had worn off enough for Arnie to think about lunch. Out of habit, he drove to the truck-stop diner at the edge of town. It was near the tractor plant and a few of the workers were usually present. He thought he might pick up some scuttlebutt about job openings. Not that he yearned to go back on the line, but he had to start doing something of a money-making nature soon.

He found a vacant stool at the end of the counter. The nearby window booth was occupied by three men with familiar faces. One, in a natty grey business suit that matched his hair, was an executive at the plant. Sitting beside him was a younger man in slacks and a sweater, the town's busiest veterinarian. The third man, a big guy built like a football lineman, was getting a bit bald. Arnie couldn't identify him right off, but he knew he'd seen him around.

Buttering the toast that came with his Western omelet, Arnie couldn't help eavesdropping.

"I guess the possession I'm proudest of is my house," the factory bigwig was saying. "When I was a kid I used to deliver newspapers to the old Clay mansion, and it was the biggest dream of my life to live there. By the time old man Clay died, the house was a mess. But now Sally and I have it fixed up, it's ours, and we love it."

The veterinarian grinned sheepishly. "I like my house all right, but I'll have to admit it's not my proudest possession. You guys can guess what I'm going to say: my vintage Duesenberg. She's a genuine classic, and I've got her tuned up better than when she left the showroom back in 1935."

Arnie waited to hear what the third man would say. The big fellow seemed lost in thought for a moment and didn't speak until the vet gave him a poke.

"Come on, Tom, what's *your* proudest possession?"

Tom blushed. "You can guess what I'm going to say too. I talk about it enough. My proudest possession is that wall in my den—you know the one I mean. It cost me a hundred thousand bucks, but it was worth every penny. They say pride is a sin—and if it is, I confess to it. That hundred-thousand-dollar wall has given me the greatest satisfaction of my life."

The talk drifted to other topics, but Arnie found his attention stuck on the big man's admission.

What could make a wall cost a hundred grand?

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The first answer that came to him was a safe filled with cash hidden from the IRS. But that didn't sound right. The burly man didn't seem the type who would brag about the contents of a safe, legal or illegal. His pride in whatever it was appeared almost shy, his pleasure tinged with embarrassment.

That's when Arnie's scalp tingled with the feeling of a match.

First there had been that article about the big money to be made in art theft. Here, now, was a man with a hundred grand on his wall. What could it be but a valuable painting? And what could it mean but that Arnie was supposed to steal it? He hadn't felt so strong a hunch about anything since the little old lady sent him sprawling in the supermarket.

The fact was, the young redhead at the counter wasn't exactly a stranger to theft, although he had never before ventured into the big time. His past efforts had been limited to lifting a few cases of beer from the back of one of the big semis parked outside the diner or a few cartons of cigarettes from a delivery van. But he did have a contact in town who had helped him, on occasion, to dispose of some of his acquisitions—for a price, of course. Fat Joe Decker, son of the town's most famous bootlegger during Prohibition, himself functioned mostly in the field of illegal slot machines and punchboards. But he still had some good connections in Chicago. If Arnie ever found himself with a hot painting on his hands, Fat Joe would be the guy to see.

Decker lived across the tracks on the north side of town and conducted whatever business he had from home. It was certainly worth a visit to sound him out. But before Arnie drove there, he pulled up on a side street, took out the magazine, and finished reading the article on art theft.

The further he went, the better it all seemed.

Upwards of eighteen thousand dollars in art works had been stolen in the United States last year. The customers were presumed to be unsuspecting collectors overseas, including a number of Middle East potentates. Mob connections were strongly suspected. Law-enforcement officials believed that some of the thieves were actually stealing under contract.

Arnie put the magazine on the seat beside him and headed north. Maybe this was the career he'd been looking for. The hundred-thousand-dollar wall could be his foot in the door.

Joe Decker was standing in the rutted dirt lane that passed for his

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driveway, tinkering with his van. Neither his vehicle nor his attire gave any hint of his status in certain high places. He looked more like a gas-pump jockey than an occasional envoy of the Syndicate.

Arnie made his inquiries purposely vague. Would the boys in Chicago be interested, did Joe think, in a deal involving a valuable work of art? The slot-machine entrepreneur shrugged. He could certainly check it out.

Backing out of Fat Joe's driveway, Arnie reminded himself that his vagueness with Joe hadn't been entirely by design. He himself was deficient in specifics. He didn't even know the painting's owner's name, let alone where he lived or what his habits were. The person most likely to be able to fill in those gaps was Maxine, the waitress at the diner. He headed back there.

At this post-luncheon hour, the tables and booths were almost empty and there were only a few stools occupied at the counter. Arnie ordered coffee and blueberry pie à la mode and waited for Maxine to pause for a chat.

She was a short blonde in her forties who had once been the high-school sweetheart of Arnie's oldest brother. She still demonstrated a sisterly concern for Arnie's welfare. For some reason she had never married, and the truck stop and its customers were her whole life. If the local paper had carried a gossip column, Maxine could have kept it filled every day.

"The big guy in the booth this noon?" Maxine placed him immediately. "That was Tom Corbett. He has his own construction business. Very big. But if you're looking for a job I doubt if he's your man. Most of his guys are union."

Arnie mumbled something about the possibility of working as a time-keeper, a slot not covered by the unions, and let Maxine go on.

"You could certainly learn a lot from a guy like Tom Corbett. He's a real success story in this town. Quit school when he was about twelve to go to work. He learned the construction business from the ground up and now he's a millionaire, or close to it. He built the armory, the new grade school, and just about every big project around here in the past twenty years. He's now working on the addition to the country club."

Arnie took a large bite of purple-streaked ice cream. What he was hearing sounded perfect. And Maxine hadn't finished.

"Mr. Corbett built himself a gorgeous big home out in the Ridgewood

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section about fifteen years ago. The first private swimming pool in town. Then his wife died, leaving him with six kids, all in their teens or under." Maxine paused with the skill of a professional storyteller to let Arnie absorb the sad implications. Then she brightened.

"He brought the kids up all by himself, and every single one of them is doing great. The *Journal* wrote them up not long ago. The oldest daughter is a lawyer in Chicago. One son is a doctor in the Quad Cities. Another daughter teaches art at the university. I don't remember about the others, but they're all smart as whips."

Arnie zeroed in on only a portion of what Maxine had said—the part about the daughter who taught art. It tied in. Maybe she was the one who had encouraged her father to lay out $100,000 for a painting.

Arnie took a sip of coffee and tried to manifest an interest that would appear merely casual. "Are any of the kids still living at home?"

"I don't think so," Maxine replied. "Mr. Corbett's living in that big house all by himself. But maybe not for long. The talk is that, with the kids all set, he's thinking about getting married again—to that nice widow, Mrs. Andrews, who works at the library. Jenny's seen them together at some Elks dances."

As Maxine elaborated on the new romance in Corbett's life, Arnie's thoughts wandered. Her words didn't come into sharp focus again until she said, "He waits for her at the library every Wednesday night—that's the only night it's open—and they go out to dinner together. They drive up to that spiffy new open-all-night place out by the Interstate."

Arnie smiled to himself. Maxine had not only supplied him with the where, but with the when.

He had two days to do what he had to do.

First he copied Tom Corbett's address from the phone book and made a careful tour of the Ridgewood neighborhood. Then he visited the country-club construction site and managed to discover what kind of car Corbett drove. On Wednesday night he would know what to look for to confirm the builder's presence at the library.

He paid another visit to Fat Joe Decker and received the word that Chicago was definitely interested. Money arrangements would of necessity be loose, but if the goods proved as valuable as advertised Arnie could be assured of a healthy share of the profits.

Back in his own cluttered quarters, Arnie gathered together the tools

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he was likely to need to gain entry to Corbett's house and inserted two fresh batteries in his flashlight. Then, stretching out on the bed, he reread the article on the big money to be made in purloined art.

The account couldn't have been more encouraging for an ambitious young hustler contemplating a career as an art thief.

Works by minor as well as major masters were in big demand. And the thieves were seldom caught, the ease with which art works can be transported across state and national boundaries being a major contributing factor.

No wonder Chicago was interested! Even if Tom Corbett's pride and joy wasn't in a league with Rembrandt or Picasso it could still be a winner.

When Wednesday came, Arnie ate a casual dinner at the truck stop, waiting for darkness. It was almost 8:30 when he passed the library corner and spotted Corbett's dark-blue Lincoln parked at the side. Driving out toward Ridgewood, he felt more excited than he had in months. It was with this same keyed-up certainty that he had placed his bet on Tripping Lady.

Corbett's big ranch-style house was the third one from the corner. Arnie drove around the block and found a parking spot on the cross street, shaded from the street light by a tree. This was the sort of neighborhood where everybody knew everybody else's car, and he hoped nobody would take notice of an unfamiliar one.

It would be safest to cut unseen across the wide, dark back yards to reach Corbett's house, but Arnie hesitated. What if a barking dog chained up behind one of the houses brought the whole neighborhood out? He felt a shiver across his shoulders. What if Corbett himself had a dog *inside* the house? Arnie hadn't thought of that possibility before. What else had he overlooked in his eagerness to get his hands on whatever was on Corbett's wall?

For an instant, he was tempted to get back into the car and forget the whole thing. But then he remembered his conversation with Fat Joe. If he could pull this off it could be the start of something terrific. And, besides, the match was too good—the dentist's magazine and the diner conversation one right after the other. If he had chickened out those earlier times, he wouldn't have had a winning ticket to cash in or a pretty girl in his bed.

Walking purposefully toward the house, Arnie looked up and down the

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street. There was no one at any of the windows that he could see. In the nearest house, a flickering oblong of light indicated the residents were watching television. The house on the far side was dark. So was Corbett's. Arnie waited until a car passed the intersection behind him, then quickly ran up to the front of the house and, staying close to the shrubbery, circled around to find the rear door.

Getting in was a breeze. And no dog greeted him.

Letting himself quietly into the kitchen, Arnie clicked on his flashlight and, keeping the beam pointed low, moved through the adjoining dining and living rooms. Near the front stairs was another doorway and, through it, the flashlight beam was reflected back from a darkened TV screen. This must be the den.

The first thing Arnie's eyes picked out was a wall lined with bookcases. Turning slightly, he found himself facing a wide, curtained picture window overlooking the back yard. The next wall contained an arrangement of framed documents and Arnie flipped his light quickly past them to the fourth wall.

Empty!

He stopped short. Then slowly circled the room a second time with his flashlight beam.

A hundred grand worth of rare books? Not likely. The flashlight revealed an encyclopedia set, a full shelf of digest books, what appeared to be bound copies of trade magazines, and a scattering of contemporary best-sellers and mysteries. Arnie's eyes moved again to the picture window, then on once more to the wall with the documents. Could there be a safe hidden behind one of them?

Nervously he twisted several of the frames on their hooks and saw nothing on the wall behind. The beam hit some Latin words on the closest of the frame objects: *Baccalaurei in Artibus*. Some of the others seemed to have Latin on them too. Then he picked out the names. Thomas Corbett, Jr. Ellen Corbett. Robert, Gloria, Frank, Timothy. He recognized the name of a famous university.

Finally it sank in. *Diplomas!*

It took Arnie a minute to absorb the full significance of what he was seeing. Tom Corbett hadn't been talking about a painting. The hundred-thousand-dollar wall consisted of his kids' diplomas.

College cost a fortune these days. And Tom Corbett's six youngsters hadn't merely gone to college. Some of them had gone on to medical

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school and law school. That would have cost the builder at least $100,000, Arnie realized—maybe more. And of course a grade-school dropout would be especially proud of this wall. It was proof that he had been able to give his children the kind of education he'd never managed to get for himself.

Arnie switched his flashlight off just in time to see the lights of a patrol car pulling into the driveway out front.

Feeling his way back to the kitchen door in the dark, he slipped outside and raced across the back yards to where he had parked his car.

Nobody saw him—or at least nobody gave chase. Once he got the motor running, he backed the car to the far intersection, made a fast turn, and headed toward the center of town. Within ten minutes, though still shaky, he was safe in his room.

Arnie thrashed in his bed most of the night, alternating between relief and frustration. Relief at not being in a jail cell, frustration because of a nagging sense of incompletion.

The match had seemed so perfect! He'd never been wrong about one before. Was he losing his touch?

Diplomas!

When he awoke in the morning he could still see in his imagination the bright beam of the flashlight shining on that wall of framed documents in Tom Corbett's den. Then, for the first time, the thought occurred to him that perhaps there *was* a match somewhere and that he had simply been mistaken about the ingredients.

What if, after all, the significant item was not a work of art but a *diploma!*

He let his mind play with the idea and, in the process, remembered his visit to the dentist's office on Monday. He had examined a diploma on the wall there just before he'd read the art-theft article. Maybe that was the match! His imagination raced on.

Maybe the diplomas indicated something to do with school. Maybe even college—something he had never thought of before. Maybe his future lay on the campus of an institution of higher learning!

Arnie acted on his hunch within the week. He is now the number-two man on the janitorial staff of a major university.

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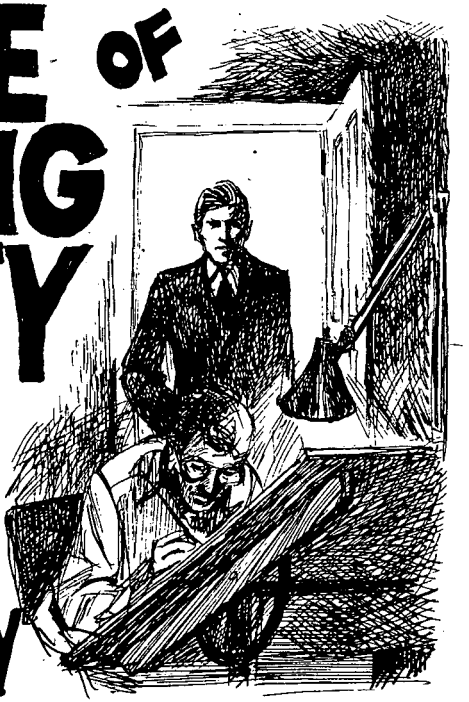
Coyne Maxwell, the famous photographer, worked exclusively in black-and-white . . .

A CASE OF MISSING IDENTITY

by JAMES McKIMMEY



"Then you would have no idea whatever why your husband has disappeared, Mrs. Maxwell?"

Dalmo Donovan was seated in his expensively appointed office in downtown Reno. The woman—short, plump, sixty-five years old, and looking grandmotherly in her flower-print dress—shook her head.

"No." She looked at him imploringly with milk-blue eyes. "As I told you on the phone, Mr. Donovan, several people I hold in high respect

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have informed me you're extremely skilled at finding people who have disappeared—that you're a psychologist and apply your training in your work. Do you think you know enough about my husband to discover why he'd want to disappear off the face of the earth?" There was an edge of hysteria in her otherwise softly modulated voice.

Donovan swiveled in his high-backed chair and gazed out the window. High-rises blocked the spring-morning view that years ago would have revealed long spreads of desert land with the Sierra Mountains bluish in distant profile. But Donovan wasn't looking outward; he was searching his memory for what he knew about Coyne Maxwell.

In the estimation of many authorities Maxwell ranked next to Ansel Adams as a professional photographer. They were considered two of the handful of great living printmakers who had chosen to restrict their work to black-and-white. Both had singled out the American West, particularly the Sierra Nevadas, as a major subject for their cameras. Both had tremendous cult followings. Both had been pictured on the cover of *Time*.

But twelve days ago Coyne Maxwell had left his home on the Coast for a three-day photographic expedition, had been driven to San Francisco International Airport by his wife, had boarded a plane intending to photograph in the Comstock Lode vicinity around Virginia City, and had, upon landing in Reno, telephoned his wife that he was on his way into the mountains. Mrs. Maxwell had not heard from him since.

"Well, Mr. Donovan?"

"I've read just about everything that's been written about your husband, Mrs. Maxwell," Donovan said. "But I certainly don't know enough about him to have the faintest notion why he's been out of touch with you. But you said something I find curious. Why would he *want* to disappear? There could be other reasons besides wanting to, you know."

"I certainly can't think of any."

"You told me when you made this appointment that he would have rented a car after he phoned you from Reno."

"Yes."

"I've checked every automobile rental agency here. Not one rented a car to your husband."

"Not in his name anyway," Mrs. Maxwell said. "He's famous, Mr. Donovan. That's why I don't want this to get out."

"I'm aware of his fame, Mrs. Maxwell."

"Well, I don't know if you've ever thought about it," she said, "but of

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the millions of people who live in this country thousands think they're photographers. And when they get word my husband's around, they bother him something terrible, showing him their work and asking him questions. So he doesn't use his real identity when he's traveling."

"A great many people would know him by sight—seventyish, rather tall, slim but muscular, bald, and, of course, that full white beard."

She shook her head. "In all the pictures published of him, he always wears that beard. And of course Ansel has one too. So whenever he's wanted to look different from the way the public recognizes him, he's shaved off the beard. As he did before he left on this trip."

"But he had to present identification to rent a car. He had to leave something as security too—usually they require a major credit card."

"Coyne has a bunch of phony driver's licenses for identification. He uses a picture of himself without the beard on all of them—and common names like John Jones or Henry Smith. California licenses are really just photographic prints on Kodak paper, you know, so it wasn't any trouble for him to do that in his darkroom. And instead of a credit card, Coyne usually presents cash for security."

"Then he was carrying quite a lot of money as well as all that expensive equipment. Perhaps somebody targeted him for—"

"But he carries his expensive equipment in an old suitcase. He outfitted it inside so he could carry everything he needed on a trip like this. As far as money, he never carries more than he absolutely needs."

Donovan considered.

"Well, I guess he wouldn't have had to leave much to rent a small older car," he said.

"That's the kind he always rents. I guess you'd call him an economical man. The only new thing he ever buys is photographic equipment. His clothes are all secondhand. But that's not a criticism on my part. It's just the way he is—was—" Her voice trailed off.

Donovan was thinking that Edith Maxwell was a truly concerned woman, who was obviously deeply in love with her husband. She was also, Donovan decided, a compliant type of personality—probably somewhat weak and helpless by herself. With Coyne Maxwell she was undoubtedly an estimable woman. Without him she was demoralized.

"Who hated him?" Donovan asked abruptly.

"Not a soul!"

"How about all those would-be photographers? There's a certain lunatic

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fringe in every field. Maybe one was snubbed by your husband, became emotionally agitated—"

"Coyne never snubbed any of the people who tracked him down. He made all of them feel as if they could be better than they were if they half tried."

"But he really didn't feel that way?"

"No." She blinked. "I'm terribly upset, Mr. Donovan."

Donovan sat silently, then said, "Assuming that he rented a car before whatever happened to him, he logically would have driven it up in the direction of Virginia City, probably using Geiger Grade. That's quite a twisty, steep climb. If he were speeding in a small car, he could have gone off the road and landed somewhere down in the rocks where he can't be easily seen. That's a possibility that has to be faced."

"No," she said firmly. "Coyne was an extremely careful driver. And one of the slowest. He wanted to see everything, and to stop and take pictures if he liked. On a mountain road he'd drive at ten miles an hour. Besides—even if somehow he *did* get into an accident, he'd come out of it with hardly a scratch. He's come through six that way."

"But if he drives so carefully—"

"Other people were driving. And Coyne said there was a reason he never got killed. He said the Almighty was taking care of him so he could go on giving the world his art." Her pale eyes misted. "I just hope the Almighty doesn't figure Coyne's given the world *enough* of his art."

"Many things can happen in rugged country like the Comstock, Mrs. Maxwell. Maybe he stepped on a rattlesnake. Maybe he went into one of those abandoned gold mines and it caved in. He might even have had a heart attack out somewhere alone. I'm sorry, but—"

"Mr. Donovan," she said, "Coyne is one of the most experienced, sturdy, self-sufficient men alive. He's been prowling the Sierras for over forty years, mostly by himself. There's hardly anything he wouldn't be prepared for, including snakes and old mines. He had his annual physical just a few weeks ago, and the doctor compared him to a healthy young bull. I can't believe that anything just happened to him that took him out of touch with me, unless it was the call of the Almighty. And I don't believe the Almighty's anywhere near ready to call him. So I say that whatever happened was of his own choice. He *wanted* to disappear, Mr. Donovan. You've got to figure out why! Then maybe you can find him." A tear started rolling down her cheek. "I'm not worth so much as a gnat

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floating in a cold bowl of soup without that man. You've just got to find him for me, Mr. Donovan!"

It was, Donovan thought, becoming increasingly difficult not to become involved. "Do you happen to have a picture of him with you, Mrs. Maxwell?"

"I have a portrait he did of himself," she said, digging into her purse. She extracted a black-and-white photograph of the full-bearded Coyne Maxwell and handed it across to Donovan. "How much do you want to go to work?"

"I usually ask for half of my fee before looking, the other half if I find the person. In this case, if I can find him, Mrs. Maxwell, I'll take any signed archival print of his own selection as total payment. I would be very honored to have it."

She nodded, wiping at her damp face. "If you find him, I guarantee you'll get just that, Mr. Donovan."

Donovan's artist friend, Fulcrum, lived in a small decaying cottage on the southern edge of town. He was spidery thin, seven inches over six feet, and had a thickly wild thatch of hair the color of cantaloupe. His eyes appeared grotesquely large and bulging through the thick lenses of his glasses. He was an excellent commercial artist who did freelance layouts for various businesses. He had painted fine imitations of the works of Van Gogh, Matisse, and Picasso, but he was incapable of creating a worthy original of his own. And he was entirely content to live with that and by himself.

Donovan parked his green Mercedes in Fulcrum's driveway and walked through the cool air to the open doorway and into the well lighted living room that served as Fulcrum's studio. Fulcrum sat hunched over a tipped drafting table working with a brush, his glasses no more than two inches away from what he was painting. Without looking up he said, "Morning, Dalmo. What happens, man?"

"I'm looking for somebody, Fulcrum," Donovan said, wondering how a man who seemed nearly blind could so easily identify someone without appearing to look at him.

"As usual. What can I do to help?"

Donovan placed the photograph Mrs. Maxwell had given him on the drafting table. "Sketch him without the beard."

"Great God!" Fulcrum said. "Coyne Maxwell!"

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"Let's not broadcast it, Fulcrum."

Within an hour, Donovan had shown the sketch Fulcrum had drawn to five car-rental agencies. Clerks in two of them thought they had rented cars to someone who looked something like the sketch, but both cars had since been returned.

Then Donovan visited a sixth agency and showed the sketch to the small, bow-tied man who said he was the owner.

"Yes," the man said, looking at the drawing, anger beginning to tighten his features. "The chin's different, but he's got to be the one, all right!"

"The one?" Donovan asked.

"Who rented a '68 VW bug—Harry Smith. He said he was going to use it for three days. He didn't have a credit card, his clothes looked like he'd bought them at Goodwill, and he was carrying one of the tackiest bags I've ever seen. Yet I, with my *brains,* let him have that car for a hundred and fifty bucks as security! And he never came back, damn him! That VW had an original engine that didn't use two drops of oil between changes!"

"I'd like the car's license number and description, if you don't mind," Donovan said.

"Yeah. O.K. But you're going to have to go a long way to find him—he's probably in Mazatlán by now!" The man scribbled on a slip of paper, then shoved it toward Donovan. "You're a cop, I guess. What's he wanted for? Or would you prefer not to offend my sensibilities?"

"I wouldn't want to offend your sensibilities," Donovan told him.

Donovan drove his powerful coupe up the narrow, tight-turning Geiger Grade that led to Virginia City. He could see the rugged rise of tall mountains to the west as he turned in that direction—and then perhaps fifty miles across the lower valleys toward the east as he maneuvered other curves in this sagebrush, piñon-tree, and coyote country.

The description of the Volkswagen sedan was that it had been faded to a dull red and had dents in the fenders and both doors. Donovan looked down a steep ravine as he moved upward. Yes, he thought, despite the care of the driver, that little red car could have gone over and lodged somewhere down below, unseen from above. And yet he kept remembering Mrs. Maxwell's urgent, absolute voice reasoning that her husband couldn't be the victim of destruction, but rather had, for some unknown reason, made the decision to disappear.

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Donovan considered the Comstock territory around Virginia City. In the main it was contained in Storey County, of which Virginia City was the seat. Nearby communities were negligible in population. The only other county seat within the area was the ancient town of Greebles in adjoining Lone County.

Donovan reached Virginia City and drove slowly along the main street with its melange of frontier-history reminders and present-day gimcracks designed to trap the steady flow of tourists traveling through: sagging boardwalks in front of buildings erected during the flourishing days of the gold rush, buildings converted now to casino-bars with garish signs offering low-priced drinks, jumbo hot dogs, old-time candies, the most generous slot machines in Nevada, and Your Name in Headlines While-U-Wait.

He drove directly to the courthouse. Sheriff's officers there whom he knew had no information that could be tied to Coyne Maxwell or to the car he'd rented. He drove on through the mountains, the narrow road snaking between walls of rocks, through canyons, past groves of cottonwoods, across an old bridge, then climbed once more, a mountain now flush to his right, toward the small community of Greebles.

The road curved right and then left, with the mountain wall constantly rising sheerly to his right. This was a route traveled only by automobiles. Higher up he would cross a wider, straighter route used by trucks. Where the roads crossed was a blind intersection protected by a lone traffic signal.

As Donovan approached that blind intersection, the signal was red, indicating that a vehicle was approaching out of sight from the right, having triggered a control on the road it was descending. Donovan braked to a stop with a sense of something being slightly wrong here. A strong whistling wind prevented his hearing the vehicle as it neared. Then a double rig carrying freshly cut logs came into sight and hurtled past the intersection.

When the light turned green Donovan proceeded to the cluster of houses and small business buildings that comprised Greebles, and again he drove to the courthouse and the sheriff's office where he was known. A lieutenant named Booker informed him the sheriff was on vacation in Hawaii.

Donovan sat down in the small room to talk with the lean, windburned officer.

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"What's new, Lieutenant?" he asked.

"Count it on the fingers of one hand, Dalmo. Who're you looking for this time?"

Donovan gave him the sketch Fulcrum had created.

Booker studied it, turning it this way and that. "Kind of hard, right off."

Donovan handed him the picture Mrs. Maxwell had given him. "That help?"

Booker shook his head. "It's not the same guy, is it? But wait. This one without the beard who looks like anybody's uncle—chin's a lot weaker, neck's a lot longer than on the drawing, but it's him all right. Yeah. We got this guy in a cell!"

Donovan felt a small excitement. "What's his name, Lieutenant?"

"Who knows? He won't tell us."

Donovan took back the sketch, then pointed at the photograph of Coyne Maxwell wearing his full beard. "Does he look like anybody you've ever seen before, one way or another?"

"Nah," Booker said definitely. "Who is he? The guy we got?"

"Maybe."

"What's his name?"

"Let's call him Mr. X. What's he in jail for?"

"Now *that's* one of the things you could count on the fingers of one hand that's livened things up for us around here lately, Dalmo. Zeb Triggs was trucking down a load of heifers from the meadows up there where he grazes cattle when winter's over. Coming down the truck let out to third gear toward the blind intersection and this old dimwit goes right past the traffic signal like it wasn't there—the damn fool. And here comes Zeb in the cattle truck. Wham! They were all of a sudden introduced."

Lieutenant Booker shook his head. "It clean totaled the dimwit's car—I mean that little VW was splattered all over the mountainside. I don't know how the old man came out of it with no more than a cut on his head, but he did. We found him walking along later like nothing had happened—after the roundup."

"The roundup?"

"Well, that collision hardly dented Zeb Triggs's truck. But it unnerved him enough so he began to shimmy around and he skidded to a stop hard enough so it pushed them cattle forward and then back against the rear gate so as to bust it. By the time he stopped, them heifers were jumping

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out and heading off in every direction. We found the old man a bit later and arrested him. When Judge Baker came through on his circuit visit next day he gave him a thousand-dollar fine or three months in jail. The old man hasn't got the money, so it's the three months."

"Did he say he saw the signal light?"

"Yeah. Only he claimed it was green for him so he went on through. But it was green for Zeb Triggs, not him. Had to be, on account the truck'll trigger it green a long way ahead of that intersection to get a good, safe right of way. When a car approaches, the car's *got* to get the red signal!"

"You said he hasn't given you a name. Doesn't he have a driver's license?"

"Nope. Not even a wallet."

"What are the license-plate numbers on his car?"

"Never found neither plate! Did find his suitcase—an old beat-up thing full of busted-apart camera stuff. Amateur photographer, I guess."

"I'd like to visit with him, Lieutenant."

"Why not?"

The cell was clean and brightly lit, with sunlight flowing in through the bars of a window overlooking a magnificent view of the Sierra. The prisoner, lean and bald, a recently healed gash on the top of his head, sat on a cot. His face looked freshly shaven. He wore issued denim that was neat but faded. He stared at them with angry eyes.

"I have someone here who'd like to chat with you," Booker told him.

"Well, tell him I'm sorry," the prisoner said. "I have no desire to chat with anyone."

"He's all yours, Dalmo," Booker said, and left Donovan in the cell.

"I'd really like to talk to you," Donovan said.

The old man got up and went to the barred window. "Even prisoners have rights. The one I'm requesting is privacy."

Donovan studied the way Maxwell stood beside the window. His bearing, despite his age, revealed pride and very probably arrogance. "I want to get you out of here," Donovan said.

"I have no idea why that should be, since I have no idea who you are," Maxwell said. "And I'm not remotely curious about it either. I am content, sir, to remain right here. Please go away."

Back near the blind intersection, Donovan found a small turn-out,

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parked, and walked over to examine the traffic signal. Something had bothered him earlier here. Now, looking at the device very carefully, he knew what it was.

The next morning, as early sunshine slanted down the mountain slopes, he drove back to the courthouse in Greebles. He went inside carrying a stack of five-by-seven cards and said to Lieutenant Booker, "That's a new signal light at the blind intersection, isn't it?"

Booker blinked. "Well, yeah, it is. Some darn kids rolled a boulder down on the other one and wiped it out."

"Homemade too, isn't it?"

Booker was beginning to look defensive. "Yeah again. Si Younger's good with such things. Saved the county a little money. What's the difference, Dalmo?"

Donovan explained.

Booker shook his head, his face tinting. "Well, how in hell would we have known about that!"

"By reading the regulations, Lieutenant. This prisoner of yours could sue this county dry if what I think is true."

"This isn't *my* responsibility, Dalmo! It's the sheriff's—"

"Phone him in Honolulu, then," Donovan said. "Only first let me back in the old man's cell."

Maxwell was back sitting on his bunk. Donovan put the cards in his lap and watched the man's expression turn to panic, then to resentment, then to anger. There was no doubt of it, Donovan thought—sensory input shaped destinies.

"What are these anyway?" the old man demanded.

"Do me the favor of telling me what you see on each one. It's for your own good."

"I don't need anyone telling me what's for my own good!"

And, yes, Donovan thought, this man was representative of one who'd driven himself to achieve goals far beyond most people's desires for self-esteem. But he had his Achilles' heel.

"Afraid?" Donovan asked.

"Don't be ridiculous!" The man picked up a card from his lap and said, "There's a 92 in that circle of colored dots."

Donovan nodded. "Keep going."

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Maxwell did, reciting one number after the other. Donovan had asked Fulcrum to copy on the cards examples that had been printed in a number of widely read books on psychology Donovan had taken from his personal library. Now Donovan knew positively that Maxwell had studied these same well-known examples as a hedge against any possibility and then compensated for what he'd actually seen by saying what he *should* have seen.

When he reached the last card, Maxwell hesitated.

Donovan took it from him. "You've got them all right so far—why not this eight?"

"An eight. Of course. A perfect eight."

"Wrong," Donovan said. "You've lied about what you really saw on every other card. But the combination on the last one hasn't been commonly used in such tests. It's a perfect fifteen for anyone with normal color vision. But you suffer red-green deficiencies, Mr. Maxwell. You're color blind."

Coyne Maxwell covered his eyes with his hand. Donovan could only guess how much he was suffering right now.

"Can you understand what letting this out would mean for me?" Maxwell said. "Considering my stated preference for working in black-and-white as a photographer? Considering my pronouncements about the use of color film in an attempt to convey true living colors being a travesty because it's an impossibility? Considering my statement that black-and-white is the logical and only legitimate preference a photographer can make because it's a truthful effort at an *illusion* of reality?"

"I've read your essays on the superiority of black-and-white," Donovan said.

"And all the time I've restricted my work to it simply because I can't see worth a damn in color. You just can't know—"

"But I know enough to get you out of here. Your wife hired me to find you, Mr. Maxwell. And now that I have, we're leaving."

Maxwell was looking confused. "I don't understand—"

"That traffic signal at the intersection outside of town was made by a local. He did two things wrong.

"Approved manufacturers of traffic lights use glass that lets through a great many yellow waves along with the reds, blues, and greens, and that gives someone with your deficiencies enough clues in terms of brightness and saturation to distinguish the colors in the right fashion. But this local

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man used plain glass, a fact he admitted to me earlier this morning. His second mistake was in installing the thing upside down so that the red signal was in the reverse position of what you'd normally expect. That's why you drove through the intersection, thinking you had a green light. I've told the lieutenant in charge here that a bungled job like that could cost them a fortune if you decide to sue the county on the basis of illegal signal equipment and subsequent false arrest."

"No!" Maxwell said. "I don't want the notoriety of suing anyone. I just want to get out of here without anyone else knowing."

Lieutenant Booker appeared at the door of the cell. "Your friend's free to leave any time he wants, Dalmo," he said wearily. "The sheriff telephoned the judge, and that's their decision."

Donovan drove away from the public telephone booth in Greebles, Coyne Maxwell sitting beside him wearing his own secondhand clothing instead of jailhouse denim. Maxwell had just telephoned his wife. Now he said, "You absolutely didn't tell them who I was, Mr. Donovan?"

"No, I didn't," Donovan assured him. "What did you do with your wallet, by the way?"

"Well, it had a phony driver's license in it, but it had my real one too. After the accident I was a little groggy, but I realized I must have done something wrong as far as that signal light was concerned. So I hid the wallet while those cattle were bolting all over the place. It was a comic scene, I suppose, in a way." As they neared the intersection a few minutes later, he said, "If you'd be so kind as to stop right up ahead by that cottonwood I'll retrieve it."

Donovan stopped and waited while Maxwell scrambled down a bank and dug his wallet out from behind some rocks. What he had been willing to accept to keep from marring his position in the world! Donovan thought. A three-month incarceration, the monumental worry suffered by his wife and the rest of his family—his ego-involvement was so total Donovan wondered how much further he might be willing to go to hide the public revelation of his Achilles heel. The man was a perfect candidate for blackmail.

Donovan put the car into gear as Maxwell climbed back in beside him.

"You're a very impressive man, Mr. Donovan," the photographer said. "What were your financial arrangements with my wife, may I ask?"

"Any archival print of yours, signed by you and selected by you."

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Maxwell pondered. "Do you know one called 'Sunrise, Zephyr Heights, Nevada'?"

"Anyone who knows anything about great photography knows that photograph. I understand you've retained just one print and destroyed the negative."

"It's yours, Mr. Donovan."

Donovan looked at him, startled. "I have some idea what that print's worth. And I—well—"

"You've heard that I'm a penny-pincher? Well, I am, usually. But I'm very grateful for what you've done." He sobered. "Still, I'm worried about that police lieutenant back in Greebles. Maybe he does suspect who I am. Maybe he's just biding his time, trying to decide the best way to cash in on the whole thing."

"He doesn't have the faintest idea," Donovan said.

"Well—without the full beard that should be true. But even so, I'm still concerned that—"

"I showed him a picture of you with your beard, Mr. Maxwell—a photograph your wife gave me."

"Oh, God!"

"But he still didn't recognize you. I'm certain he doesn't know a solitary thing about you—and never will."

"And never will?" Coyne Maxwell's expression was one of total astonishment. "Oh now, Mr. Donovan, I find that incredible! As a matter of fact, I find that absolutely impossible to accept!"

The April 1 issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale March 5.

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Miss Boyce was a decisive woman, even about a day trip to the Everglades . . .

SIDE TRIP

by JOHN H. DIRCKX

Miss Boyce dined alone in the motel restaurant. During the past four days she hadn't struck up more than a small-talk acquaintance with any of the others in the tour group, not even the other two unattached women. Especially not with them.

The Forty-One Winks on Highway 41 was the kind of overnight accommodation she'd come to expect by now—blatantly third-rate and eleven miles from the ocean. But the food was better here than at the

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gaudy flytrap where they'd stayed last night in Orlando.

The Sullimans came in and ordered drinks. As usual, their air of strained silence gave the impression that they had just quarreled violently. Though they sat together on the bus and at meals, they kept their distance from each other otherwise. Mr. Sulliman's chief occupation seemed to be explaining that their name wasn't Sullivan, while his wife devoted much of her time to making sure that chairs, benches, and bus seats were free of dust before she sat on them.

The restaurant was three-quarters empty, but it was early. Above the subdued noise of canned music and the clatter from the kitchen, Miss Boyce detected sounds of juvenile protest. Turning discreetly, she saw a young couple at the table behind her struggling with a boy of about four, who was determined to slide off his chair and under the table. His older sister sat demurely by, licking a salt shaker. Thank heaven they weren't on the tour. As Mr. Patterson, the vice-principal, was fond of saying, "Hell is other people's children."

She was glad she'd decided against dessert when, leaving the restaurant, she passed Shelley Rudnik and Vera Talbot just coming in.

Later, she sat at the window of her corner room and watched the twilight descend over a defunct ice-cream parlor, an auto-parts shop, and a weed-choked playground. It certainly wasn't Paris, where until a couple of months ago she'd expected to spend a quiet week this summer. And, she reflected with good-humored resignation, there wasn't much chance now that she'd ever again get to Paris with the French Club, since the PTA had declared what they insisted on calling a "permanent moratorium" on class trips to Europe. Of course, things had gotten badly out of hand on the last trip; she would be the first to admit that.

Someone was tapping on her door. "Who is it?" she called, but the air-conditioner drowned the reply. She put on the chain guard and opened the door.

"What are you afraid of, the bogeyman?" It was Vera Talbot. "May I come in?"

Miss Boyce undid the chain, opened the door, and retreated into the narrow room before her visitor. Vera was a recent divorcée with a drinking problem. She went to the window, as if to compare Miss Boyce's view with her own, but turned away from it quickly.

"Aren't you going to sign up for the side trip to the Everglades?"

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"I don't think so. I thought I'd spend tomorrow shopping in Miami and maybe go down to the beach later in the afternoon."

"But you can do that the day after."

"But what about the Keys?"

"Mr. Slade says that's a bummer. He says it makes him seasick just to look at one of those hydrofoils."

"Who's Mr. Slade?"

Vera gave her a look that seemed intended to be meaningful, but all it suggested to Miss Boyce was that Vera had applied her eye makeup with a trowel. "A man we met in the restaurant just now. He's in carpets and tile."

"He must look interesting. I'm sorry I missed him."

Shelley Rudnik bounced in through the open door with a clatter of bangles. "She going?" She looked quickly from Vera to Miss Boyce. "You going?"

"I haven't made up my mind."

"Oh, you've *got* to come! If they don't get sixteen names by nine o'clock tonight they'll cancel it. They only need a couple more. Come on—you don't want to miss those alligators and everything."

"I'll think about it. You two run along. If I decide to go, I'll sign up before nine."

As she shut the door behind them, she noticed Mrs. Sulliman unlocking the door across the hall. The room was dark.

Half an hour later, on her way to the lobby to sign up for the side trip to the Everglades, she saw Mr. Sulliman enjoying a pipe outside in the humid night. He was strolling around the uninhabited swimming pool in the company of Mr. Bang, a quiet, self-contained Oriental who, even in the sooty dusk, had not abandoned his two expensive-looking cameras.

Miss Boyce didn't peer under her bed before getting into it that night. She did, however, draw the curtains, latch and chain the door to the hall, and carefully check the bolt on the communicating door that led to the adjoining room.

She slept badly. The air-conditioner churned like a cement mixer. Several times she awakened abruptly and lay still, listening for a repetition of the sound, seemingly from the next room, that had awakened her.

She was up early, glad to be free of the damp and tangled sheets. While shaking the wrinkles out of her printed polyester sundress, the one she'd planned to wear shopping in Miami, she stepped on something hard at

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the foot of the bed. It was one of Shelley's bangle bracelets. It was funny she hadn't found it last night.

On an impulse she joined the Chadwicks for breakfast in the coffee shop and ordered waffles (not croissants, she thought wistfully). The Chadwicks were a young couple who thought it great fun to have their fellow travelers guess their station in life. So far, no one had come close—or so they said.

"Have you ever been to the Everglades?" asked Mr. Chadwick, spooning out a bit of melon. No, Miss Boyce replied, she hadn't. "Wet. Wet as a drowned sheep. It'll turn your hairdo to spaghetti," he said. (His wife could have told him that Miss Boyce's silvery-mauve coiffure was a wig—if he didn't know it himself.) "It rains every twelve minutes, and you can't tell if the water's coming down or going up."

Miss Boyce was surprised that Shelley and Vera weren't among the small crowd assembled in the parking lot for the Everglades trip, but the group was just getting settled in the bus and waiting for the guide to appear when Vera dashed out of the lobby in a floppy straw hat, boarded the bus, and took a seat near the front.

They lunched at a place called Angel's Pit Stop where, as Mr. Chadwick had said would be the case, they gave her a little meat with her sauce. While she was stretching her legs after lunch, Vera came up to Miss Boyce and asked her for a light. Miss Boyce lit her cigarette from a book of matches she'd picked up at the Pit Stop for her fourteen-year-old niece's matchbook collection. "Where's Shelley?" she asked.

Vera gulped smoke and sighed. "She didn't come in last night. I had to kill a bottle of brandy all by myself." (She looked it.) "A guy," she added by way of explanation.

"Mr. Slade?"

Vera looked at her sharply. "How'd you know about him?"

"You mentioned him last night. Carpets and tile?"

"That's right!"

Miss Boyce didn't much enjoy the Everglades trip. Mr. Bang kept clicking his camera relentlessly at vast monotonous prospects of marsh grass while Mr. Chadwick chattered without letup and nearly came to blows with the guide over a point of information. By the time she returned to the Forty-One Winks Miss Boyce had a savage headache. She decided to lie down before dinner.

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The manager of the motel squelched that idea. His name was Rhodes and although he was rather nice-looking he had a habit of cracking his knuckles when he was nervous. He was cracking them now as he intercepted her in the hall outside her room. "Mrs. Boyce?"

She closed her eyes gently and grinned from ear to ear, displaying what her brother Ned called her "cheerful martyr" smile. "It's Miss."

"*Miss* Boyce—I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but there's been an accident, and the police had to enter your room. They're still in there."

She stared at him in the dimly lighted hall. "What kind of accident?"

Rhodes fixed his gaze firmly on the key in her hand. "One of our guests—in the room next to yours—"

"What happened?"

"He died."

"Oh, dear." She swallowed. "Why did they need access to my room?"

As the manager was about to answer, the door of the room opened and a police lieutenant stepped into the hall. Rhodes mumbled an introduction and vanished. Miss Boyce didn't quite catch the lieutenant's name but she followed as he beckoned her into the room, where a uniformed policeman was removing the sheets from her bed. He took a card out of his pocket, which she recognized as the one she'd filled out when she'd registered at the desk the previous afternoon.

"What do you do in Flint, Theresa?"

"I teach high school—European history and French. May I ask why you're searching my room?"

"Of course. The maid found a dead man in the room next door about ten o'clock this morning."

"But what does that have to do with this room? The manager said it was an accident."

"Probably a murder-type accident. Did you know the man?"

"Why, no. At least I don't think so."

"Robert Cartmell. Also known as Robert Carter and Robin Cartwell."

She blinked at him uncomprehendingly. "Why the three names?"

"At least three. Because he was a crook—a con artist and embezzler, wanted in Colorado for fraud and bail-jumping. You never saw him or talked to him?"

"I'm pretty sure not. What did he look like?" For an unpleasant moment she was afraid he was going to show her the corpse.

"Forties—chunky, thin moustache, light-brown hair."

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She shook her head. "He wasn't on the tour I'm with."

"We know that. He just got in from El Paso yesterday. Were you in his room at any time?"

"I certainly was not! Why on earth would you think that?"

He put her card in his pocket. "Come here. It's O.K., the body's been removed." He opened the now unbolted communicating door and led her into the next room. "You see the bolt on this side? It's broken—it's probably been like that for months. Are you sure your side's been bolted right along?"

"Quite sure. Do you think that whoever killed this man—"

"*If* he was killed. He was full of alcohol and barbiturates. It could be an accident or even suicide, but since there weren't any pill bottles among his things we're leaning toward murder. But we don't know what he was doing in Miami or who he knew here—"

"But you think if somebody killed him they might have left through my room?" She put her hand to her throat.

He led her back into her room, had her sit down, and sat down himself on the dresser. The uniformed policeman, looking painfully bored, was standing with his back to the window and his arms folded over a plastic bag containing the bedsheets. "We don't know how they got out—they probably left by the hall door. It wasn't chained or bolted. The question is—how did they get in?"

"You mean they might have *entered* through this room?"

"Has there been anybody besides yourself in here since you checked in yesterday—not counting the motel staff?"

"A couple of the girls on the tour came by for a few minutes last night."

"Were you out of the room while they were here?"

"No. They weren't here for more than a few minutes."

"Did you leave the hall door open at any time when you were out of the room—getting ice or anything?"

"Yes, I did! The door sticks and I left it ajar when I went down to the lobby last night to sign up for the trip we took to the Everglades today. But I was gone less than five minutes."

"After you came back, did you notice whether this door was bolted?"

"Not right away. But I'm pretty sure it was bolted when I went to bed."

"And you chained and latched the hall door when you went to bed?"

"Yes. I'm absolutely certain of that."

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"Did you hear anything at all from that room yesterday or last night—voices, noises, television?"

Miss Boyce was unobtrusively loosening the straps of her shoes. "All you can hear in here is the air-conditioner."

The lieutenant pulled out her card again, studied it, and tapped it against his lip.

"Can I ask you a favor, Theresa?"

She shrugged and flashed her martyr smile again.

"We haven't searched your luggage—just the room, and we had the green light from the manager for that. If we have to get a warrant you may be held up on your trip, and we don't want that to happen any more than you do." He sounded as sincere as an insurance salesman telling her how much his company enjoyed paying off claims. "So if you could just let us look inside your suitcase and that other little case in the bathroom and your purse—"

She submitted gamely. The two men went through her suitcase with professional efficiency and detachment. They made such a perfunctory job of her dressing case, which was unlocked, that she felt sure they'd already been through it. She poured out the contents of her purse on the lumpy, discolored mattress and handed the purse to the lieutenant so he could verify that it was empty. She was almost insulted when they accepted Shelley Rudnik's red-enamel bangle as something that belonged among her things.

After they'd gone, a maid came and made up her bed. Feeling strangely self-indulgent, Miss Boyce climbed into it and called room service to order dinner. Tomorrow, she decided, she was going shopping in Miami no matter what happened.

She was glad she hadn't mentioned finding Shelley's bangle on the floor of her room. There was no point getting her mixed up in a murder investigation.

She thought of her own little lapse into folly during the spring, and how the fourteen hundred dollars she'd set aside for a trip to Paris had shrunk to four hundred. She'd been philosophical about the loss of the money; recovering her self-esteem had taken a little longer.

She'd never expected to see Robert again—Robert Cartier, he'd called himself when she'd first met him at the Civic Ballet. And she probably never would have seen him again either if she weren't such an incorrigible snoop, and hadn't made that little side trip into the next room before

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dinner the night before after trying the bolt on the connecting door and finding the one on the other side didn't work.

What a shock it had been, finding him there asleep in the middle of the afternoon, a nearly full bottle of tequila open on the nightstand. It had seemed so easy and so natural to take the bottle back to her own room and empty all her sleeping capsules into it one by one. Would they ever find that plastic medicine vial from the pharmacy back home with her name on the label? Probably not, unless they drained the Everglades.

Somehow she felt sure she'd sleep better tonight, even without her capsules.

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Why didn't the poison kill Ted Arkin? . . .

HEAVY BET

RICHARD CICIARELLI

It was like a scene from a movie, Tony Libra thought as he sat back in his box seat and sipped beer from a paper cup.

This was the final game of the regular season. The hometown Halstrom Cubs, one game in first place, were trailing their second-place rivals, the Johnstown Jets, 3–2. It was the bottom of the ninth, there were runners at the corners with one out, and the Cubs' Ted Arkin, who led the league in most offensive categories, was coming up to bat.

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The Jets' manager and catcher had joined Julio Navarro, their ace reliever, in a conference on the mound for a strategy session.

"They'll walk him," said a man in the box behind Libra.

"I don't know," Libra said. "That would put the winning run at second, in scoring position. Navarro throws a pretty good sinker. They'll tell him to keep the ball low for a double play."

"We'll see," said the man.

The conference on the mound broke up and Ted Arkin walked slowly to the plate. He never looked at his third-base coach; he knew what he had to do. Before stepping into the batter's box, he went through a routine now familiar to all his fans. He lifted his batting helmet and brushed his hair back from his forehead, then he tightened his batting gloves, brushed the sweat from his upper lip with the sweatbands on each wrist, measured his stance with his bat, and took his place, ready to hit.

The first pitch was a sinker, low and inside. Ball one. Navarro followed that with two fast-ball strikes and another sinker for a ball. The tension mounted and Arkin dragged it out by going through his ritual after each and every pitch.

Navarro went into his stretch, brought the ball to his waist, and was checking the runner at first when Arkin suddenly called for time out and stepped out of the batter's box. At first everyone assumed it was a ploy to unnerve the pitcher, but then Arkin dropped the bat, wrapped his arms around his waist, and began to heave and shake uncontrollably. The hometown fans jumped to their feet as both coaches, manager Phil Wayland, and several players from the dugout raced to their stricken teammate, who had dropped to his knees and slumped to the dirt.

For several long minutes a crowd of players blocked the fans' view, then Arkin was lifted and carried into the dugout.

When some calm was restored, the Cubs' manager sent a pinch hitter to the plate. He hit the first pitch on one hop to the shortstop, who began a short-to-second-to-first double play, ending the inning and the game, and leaving the two teams tied for first place.

The man in the box behind Libra cursed bitterly and stomped toward the exit.

Tony sat and stared at the field, which was now being raked and dragged by the groundskeepers. Cheers of celebration came from the visitors' dugout along the third-base line.

Oh, well, Libra said to himself, we still have the playoffs.

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The following afternoon Tony Libra was weeding his flower garden and admiring his roses and gladioli when a black-and-white police car pulled into his driveway and a man with a shock of white hair and bushy eyebrows stepped out.

"Hello, Perfessor!" Chief of Police Wilbur Backus greeted him. Although Libra was only an instructor at the college in Halstrom, Backus had taken to calling him "perfessor" ever since their first meeting several years ago.

"What brings you here, Chief?" Libra stood and brushed the dirt off his hands, extending one to the chief.

"I've got a little problem you might be able to help me solve."

Libra smiled. Backus knew that puzzles of all kinds fascinated Libra—math puzzles, word puzzles, logic problems. But most of all he enjoyed helping Backus with his unsolved crimes.

"I suppose you know about Ted Arkin collapsing at yesterday's ball game?" Backus said.

Libra nodded. "I was there."

"Suppose I told you Arkin was poisoned."

"Come out back," Libra suggested. "We can sit in comfort and you can tell me more."

The two retired to the patio where Backus sank into a comfortable lawn chair. Libra went into the house and emerged moments later with two glasses and a pitcher of lemonade.

"It was strychnine," Backus said. "When they got Arkin into the locker room, the team physician examined him and had some blood and saliva tests run over to our lab."

"Then he's dead?" Libra asked.

"No—oddly enough, he isn't. At first we couldn't figure out how Arkin was poisoned. We first suspected the water cooler in the dugout, but everyone had been drinking from that and no one else got ill. Then we found a paper cup in the wastebasket that had been loaded with strychnine. We figure somebody put poison in the cup and then put the cup back in the dispenser with the other unused ones."

"Then Arkin wasn't necessarily the target?"

"That's how it looks. Whoever happened to pull that particular cup would draw a lot more than a cupful of water. The lab men say there must have been at least a gram of strychnine in that cup. That's more than enough to kill anyone."

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"But Arkin didn't die."

"Right. Why not?"

Libra shook his head.

"And who put the poison there? We think we know *why* it was done. With the race for first place so close and the Cubs and the Jets both playing well, betting on yesterday's game was especially heavy. On the strength of a healthy Ted Arkin, the odds were in favor of the Cubs. A person could make a lot of money by betting on the Jets."

"And you suspect someone on the team of giving the Jets a little help."

Backus nodded. "Any kind of distraction in the dugout could break the Cubs players' concentration just enough to give the Jets the game. The victim didn't necessarily have to be Arkin."

"But because it was," Libra said, "and because Arkin was stricken when he was, the Jets tied the Cubs for first place and we still have a pennant race."

"That's about the size of it," Backus said. "Like I said, we think we know how and why Arkin was poisoned. But we've no idea who did it and why Arkin is still alive after swallowing such a large dose of strychnine. Care to give it a shot?"

"You bet."

"Then come on. I'm heading for the ball park now to talk with a few people. With the four-day break before the playoffs, Phil Wayland, the Cubs' manager, is holding practice. Arkin's still too sick to play—he's under observation at the hospital—but we should be able to talk to him tomorrow."

At the ball park, they walked through the unattended turnstiles. On the field pitchers were running and throwing, coaches were hitting grounders to the infield, and the other players were taking batting practice or shagging flies.

A plainclothes detective met the two men as they neared the rail that separated the stands from the playing field.

"What's up, Jack?" Backus asked.

"We found a small vial in a garbage can by the concession stand. We're not sure, but we think it held the strychnine. It's on the way to the lab now."

"Good work. Did you dust it for prints?"

"Yep. Nothing."

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"Naturally. It would have been too easy if our man left his signature behind." The detective nodded and wandered off toward the stands.

"Who do we talk to first?" Libra asked.

"The manager," Backus answered. "There he is now."

Phil Wayland, who had been watching the players in the batting cage and offering tips, strolled to the rail where Backus and Libra stood. Backus introduced the two men and explained his theory about the poison in the paper cup. "What we need to know, Mr. Wayland, is who had the opportunity to tamper with those cups."

The manager removed his cap and scratched his head. "I'm not sure, Chief. Normally George Walker, our equipment man, takes care of that, but he wasn't here yesterday. His parents were flying in from Ohio to visit and he asked to leave early to meet them at the airport. With George gone, I asked our first-base coach, John Caulfield, to help out. I'd guess he put the cups in the dispenser and filled the water cooler. You'd have to ask him about that."

"Who drank from the water cooler?" Backus asked. "Just anybody? Or all the players? Or just certain players?"

"Everybody drinks from that cooler, Chief. Anybody at all who's thirsty. I even had a couple of cups of water from it myself yesterday. That game sure dried out my mouth."

"Then anybody could have taken the cup with the poison?" Libra asked.

Wayland shrugged. "I guess so."

"Did you happen to notice if Arkin took a drink before he went up to bat?"

"I was too busy watching the Jets' dugout. I figured Tommy—the Jets' manager—would go to the mound and say something to Navarro. He wouldn't dare call the pitches from the dugout. He knew we'd steal his signals. He was waiting for the right moment to make his walk, and I wanted to know when that would be."

"Thanks," Backus said. "Would you mind if we talked to your first-base coach?"

"Not at all. I'll send him over."

Phil Wayland walked toward a huge man who had been hitting grounders to the infield. The big man looked toward Libra and Backus, nodded to Wayland, and came over to the investigators.

"Chief Backus? I'm John Caulfield. I understand you want to ask me a few questions."

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"If you don't mind. Mr. Wayland tells us you took care of the water cooler yesterday."

"That's right. George Walker usually handles that, but he had to leave early yesterday. He showed me where the cups and the water bottles were, and I set them up in the dugout just before the game."

"The cups," Libra said. "Did they come from a new package or was the box already open?"

"It was a new container. I opened the box and removed the plastic wrapping from them. Then I dropped them into the dispenser on the dugout wall."

"Were there any other cups in the dispenser at the time?"

"No. It was empty."

"You said you put the water in the cooler just before the game," Backus said. "How soon before the game?"

"Five or ten minutes."

"And the cups?"

"I put them in earlier—about half an hour before the game."

"Half an hour," Backus mused. "That gave somebody time to do the dirty deed. Did you see anyone tampering with the cups after you put them in the dispenser?"

"No. I was in the locker room most of the time talking to the players about our base-running strategy for the game."

"Coach," Libra said, "I just thought of something. Does any player have the habit of using the same cup several times? You know what I mean—getting a drink and then putting the cup somewhere between innings so he can use it again later?"

"Nope. They all use a cup once and then toss it into the wastebasket. They're only paper, you know. No sense in saving them. That's the point."

"Did you see Ted Arkin take a drink before going to the on-deck circle?"

"Are you kidding? Julio Navarro's got one of the best pick-off moves in our league. I had my eye on him every second. If I'd allowed that runner at first to get picked off my skin wouldn't be worth a two-day-old ticket."

"Thanks, Mr. Caulfield," Backus said. "Do you know if George Walker is around today? I'd like to talk with him."

"I saw George a little while ago. He's probably in the locker room. Just go into the dugout and down that ramp. Chances are he's there."

Libra and Backus thanked Caulfield and followed his directions into

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the locker room. There they saw a man in white busily sorting uniforms into various piles.

"Mr. Walker?" Backus ventured. "I'm Wilbur Backus, chief of police. This is Tony Libra from out at the college. We're investigating the poisoning of Ted Arkin."

"I don't know if I can help you, Chief. I wasn't here when it happened."

"I know, but you might have some information that could be helpful. Just what's your job here?"

"I'm the equipment manager and trainer. Before every game I lay out the uniforms and equipment for the players. I check to see that their spikes are polished, that they have their sweatbands, batting gloves, sunglasses, and everything else ready before they get here. If anybody needs his ankles or anything taped I do that too. Then, after the game, I gather up all the dirty stuff and wash it."

"Like you're doing now?"

"Yes, only usually I do it right after the game. I'm doing it now because I wasn't here yesterday."

"We were told you usually take care of the water and cups," Libra said.

"I usually do, but that's a last-minute job. John did it for me yesterday. Phil said it would be O.K."

"I see," Backus said. "What *did* you do yesterday?"

"I laid out the uniforms, checked the first-aid kit to see it was well stocked, then showed John where the cups and water bottle were. Then I left."

"Are you usually in the dugout during the games?" Backus asked.

"Yes."

"Did you ever notice if there was a pattern to who went to the water cooler first or who went last or who went most often—anything like that?"

Walker thought about it. "No—it seems to me they went and took a drink whenever they needed one."

"Did anyone have the habit of sitting near the cooler?"

"Nope."

"What time did you leave here?" Backus asked.

"A little after noon."

Libra and the chief looked at one another. It appeared that there was little to be learned at the park this afternoon. No one seemed to know anything. They thanked George Walker and returned to the playing field.

"Now what?" Tony asked.

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"I don't know," Backus admitted. "Everybody's so vague. No one saw anybody near the cups; nobody remembers who drank first or last; nobody saw Arkin drink at all. This is a tough one, Perfessor."

Libra glanced back into the dugout and let his eyes wander across the wooden bench with its shelf in the back for caps and gloves—and water cups? The concrete floor was stained with tobacco juice and dirt. At one end stood the water cooler. On the wall above it was the dispenser that only yesterday had fed Ted Arkin a poisoned cup, and on the floor near it was the wastebasket where Arkin had thrown the cup when he'd finished with it.

"Chief," Tony asked, "was that detective we talked to earlier the one who was assigned to this case yesterday?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I just thought of something I'd like to ask him."

Backus let out a bellow, and two minutes later Jack Norris had rejoined them.

"What's up, Chief?"

"The perfessor's got a question to ask you."

"Jack, where did you find the cup that had the poison in it?"

"In the dugout wastebasket."

"I know—but *where* in the basket? Near the top, the bottom—where?"

"Near the middle," Norris said after a moment's thought. "I remember somebody said something about the basket being emptied every other day. I figured that a cup near the middle was probably one of the first ones used yesterday."

"Good thinking," Libra said. "Except that it doesn't make much sense. Strychnine acts fairly rapidly. If Arkin drank the poison early in the game, he should have felt it long before the ninth inning."

"Just one more problem with this nutty case," Backus said. "Not only didn't Arkin die from the poison, he didn't even feel it for about two hours."

Libra tilted his head slightly to the right, like a bird who's just heard a strange sound. "There's one angle we haven't considered yet, Chief."

"If you mean maybe Arkin poisoned himself, forget it," Backus said. "I've thought about that. It doesn't make sense. All he had to do was strike out a few times or miss a few fly balls. That's a lot safer than faking a poisoning, especially with strychnine."

"No, no." Libra shook his head. "That's not what I mean. That game

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yesterday meant too much to Arkin for him to throw it. It could have been his ticket to the major leagues. I mean there's something we've been taking for granted all along that may not be a fact."

"I don't follow you."

"I've got a little idea, Chief. Would it be possible for you to get all the players and coaches and everybody here right now?"

Backus was confused, but he and Jack Norris rounded up everyone in the ball park within five minutes.

As the players and coaches began arriving, Libra took Norris aside and they spoke confidentially for several seconds. Norris nodded, then disappeared into the dugout and down the ramp to the locker room.

Surrounded by a mass of curious, sweating ball players, Libra felt a little nervous. "Let me begin by saying that what I'm going to suggest to you is only a theory. It can be proved right or wrong very easily, however." He paused and looked from face to face.

"One of you standing here right now placed a big bet on yesterday's game. Only he bet on the Jets."

The players looked at one another.

"Who would do that?" one of the players asked tensely. "What dirty, rotten—"

"Easy, Carl," Phil Wayland said. "Let Mr. Libra finish."

After waiting another moment to sustain the tension Libra went on. "It's true. One of you bet a bundle on the Jets and then saw to it that your team would lose so he could collect. And what better way is there to insure the team lose than to get rid of the star player?"

"Wait a minute," Backus interrupted. "You're saying that Ted Arkin *was* the target of the poisoner. But how is that possible? Anyone could have taken the poisoned cup from the dispenser."

"Remember a few minutes ago I said we were taking something for granted, Chief? The method of administering the poison is what I was talking about. I don't think the poison was administered in that cup. In fact, I don't think that cup was ever in the dispenser at all."

"Then how—?" Backus shook his head.

"It's so simple that all of us overlooked it," Libra said.

"First of all, the poisoned cup was never in the dispenser because it never came from the package Coach Caulfield opened. It was from a different box; possibly even a used cup taken from the wastebasket that hadn't been emptied from the day before. A strychnine solution was

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poured into the cup, swished around a little, thrown out, and the cup put into the basket where it would later be found by the police.

"The question now is, if the poison wasn't administered through the cup, how did it get into Ted Arkin?

"Throughout this investigation one thing has kept going through my mind. On a baseball team, many things are done by habit. A player's whole career can be described through habits—batting habits, fielding habits, stealing habits, throwing habits. Each man's habits make him a little different from everyone else. Ted Arkin has habits too—habits everyone knows about, because we see them all the time. I'm talking about how he fidgets before each pitch. One of his predictable habits is wiping his mouth with the sweatbands on his wrists."

Libra paused to let this last observation sink in. "That's right. The sweatbands. What if they were soaked in a strychnine solution? As the game wore on, Ted's perspiration would moisten the bands and deposit small amounts of the poison on his mouth each time he wiped it with them. And he *would* wipe his mouth with them every time he came to bat."

"That's why he didn't die," Backus put in. "The solution in the cup was enough to kill a horse, but he got only small traces of it from the sweatbands."

"That's it," Libra agreed. "But if the cup was not used to administer the poison, then why bother with it? We all know that Dr. Leeds, the team physician, is no fool. He was sure to recognize the symptoms of some kind of poisoning when he examined Ted Arkin. That meant an investigation. Our poisoner wanted the police to believe that the poison was in the cup and to overlook any other possibilities—especially, of course, the sweatbands."

"I still don't understand," Wayland said. "Why was it so important that the police think Ted was poisoned by that cup?"

"Time," Libra said. "With the police thinking about the cup, it would appear that the poisoner was someone who was in the stadium at the time John Caulfield opened the box of paper cups, while actually he wasn't anywhere near here."

All eyes immediately turned to George Walker.

"That's crazy!" Walker protested.

"Is it?" Libra asked. "You said yourself you tend to the equipment. You set out the batting gloves, the shoes, the sweatbands. What could

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be easier than to soak the bands in a poison solution and lay them out for Ted to put on? You know as well as anyone Ted's habit of wiping his mouth with the sweatbands before each pitch. And when the poison took effect, you'd be miles away from here."

"That's ridiculous!" Walker said.

"Maybe. Detective Norris is in the locker room now with orders not to let anyone touch yesterday's dirty laundry, particularly the sweatbands."

Walker staggered a little and slumped onto the dugout bench. "It was the money," he admitted. "I parlayed a thousand into ten grand. And nobody got hurt. I knew Ted couldn't get enough poison from the bands to kill him. And, after all, you'll win the playoffs. That's what counts."

"No," Phil Wayland said. "What counts is loyalty—and decency. Win or lose, you don't bet against your own team. And you certainly don't play games with a deadly poison." He turned to Chief Backus. "Get him out of here before one of us takes a bat to him."

As he was leaving, Tony Libra turned to look at the players who were straggling back to their fielding and batting assignments. You can do it in the playoffs, he told them silently. You can do it.

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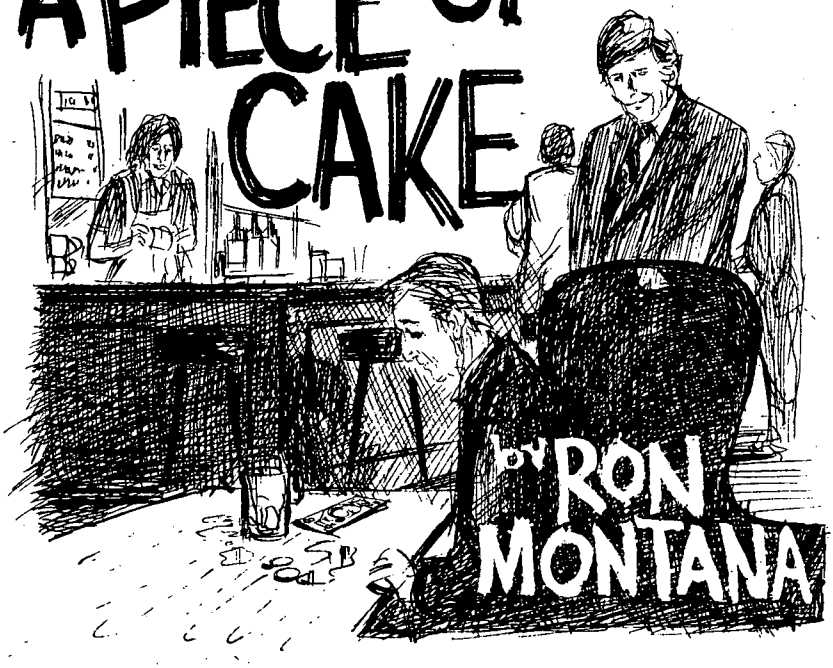
Joe wasn't about to kill nobody for no lousy two bills . . .

A PIECE OF CAKE



BY RON MONTANA

I pushed the quarter and the dime into the circle of moisture made by my empty beer glass on the scarred wooden table top. Thirty-five cents wouldn't buy me another round even in this hole-in-the-wall tavern on the edge of town, but it was all I had between me and a vagrancy rap, so I played with it, hoping the snag-toothed barmaid would think I was wondering what to order next. That way I could stay in out of the cold a little longer.

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I never met Benjamin Franklin of course—seen his picture a long time ago in school—but I really hadn't thought a lot about the man. But when the bill floated down onto the wet table top I recognized him immediately.

Benny just settled into the beer stain and got damp around the edges and I watched him smiling up at me. But I didn't touch. Not yet. I was forty years old and had spent a third of that in the jug for glomming onto what wasn't quite mine at the time, so unless this C-note had printed itself and fallen from heaven into my lap, it was fifteen-to-one it belonged to somebody.

Somebody said, "Pick it up. It won't bite you."

I looked up at Somebody standing halfway between me and the next booth. Fiftyish, distinguished at the temples, dressed money, and smiling without any teeth. Grampa Koster always told me not to trust anybody who smiled without the teeth. I guess I should have listened more.

"Lose somethin', Mister?"

"No, Mr. Koster—Joe Koster, isn't it? No, I haven't lost anything. You win anything lately?"

I hadn't, so I pegged him for one of Nick Difalco's boys—but I wondered. A collector for a back-room book who I owed fifty to—O.K., seventy-five—wouldn't come on like the Chamber of Commerce and drop a bill on my head. Not bloody likely. I smiled back, took the better part of valor, and made the bill disappear. I kept it stone-faced and stared down into my empty glass.

"Ah, that's better. Now we have something in common." He folded Benny's twin around his pudgy fingers, just south of the Kimberly diamond he was wearing on his pinky. He had my undivided attention and he knew it. "We both own crisp new hundred-dollar bills. I venture to say, Mr. Koster, at the risk of sounding trite, that there's more where that came from."

O.K., I knew I wasn't the smartest man on the other side of the law—I been called too dumb to pound sand by the last redneck fuzz that busted me—but I wasn't about to kill nobody for no lousy two bills. So what do I say? Right. "Who do I have to kill?"

He laughed this time—I swear he didn't open his mouth again—and said, "No, no, my flea-bitten friend. Nothing so drastic as that. Just a little business venture I'd like to discuss with you in greater detail. But not here. I find these surroundings terribly distasteful, and much too public for a man of—ah—my position. I can see that you're a connoisseur

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of fine art work, my rumpled consort, so if you'd care to add this second engraving to your somewhat limited collection meet me in fifteen minutes. Go up Sixth to the corner and into the all-night parking lot across the street. I'll be in the silver Continental at the back of the lot. Do be prompt. I dislike tardiness as much as my friend—" he pointed at me with the bill "—Mr. Franklin."

Silver Continental, huh? That figured. This guy was obviously an attorney who was going to tell me that my long-lost cousin twelfth removed had passed on and left me the ranch—the one where nothing would grow because of all the oil seeping out of the ground. The way my luck had been running for the last six months, except for the two when I'd stayed out of trouble as guest of the county, I'd probably break my leg getting out of the booth.

The Continental was just where he'd said it would be—sitting under the lights like a monster shark waiting for its prey. I hoped the similarity ended there.

I slid in the passenger side onto the smooth leather and watched my guest thumb a control that locked my door. He probably wanted to make sure I didn't fall out. "Thank you, Mr. Koster—and welcome. You're probably wondering why I asked you here tonight."

Somebody's laugh was like a mule choking and I was starting to get worried. Not much, just enough to break out in a case of the two-minute mile. "The thought had crossed my mind, Mr.—ah—Mr.—"

"Well, that's good, Mr. Koster. It shows you can think a little, popular opinion notwithstanding. For the moment I shall remain anonymous. It will be time enough for introductions if we strike a bargain."

"I'm listening."

As if to test my statement he held up the second C-note and rolled it around in his chubby palms. Now there are two sounds in this world that really get me excited. One is the sound of a police siren that's getting too close, and the other is the sound of good old U.S. American money being crinkled.

"I want you to rob a bank, my boy."

No buildup—no background—just: "I want you to rob a bank." Simple and to the point. I made up my mind to be just as brief. "Goodbye," I said, and, to my surprise, the door on my side unlocked.

"You are, of course, free to exercise your privilege and opt out at any

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time. But if you stay and listen for a few more minutes you can then decide, and you will be one hundred dollars richer."

I considered the logic of the situation and decided it was definitely to my advantage to get out of there. So I said, "All right. I'll listen for a few minutes."

"Very practical, Mr. Koster, very practical. I shall sum up my proposition in a very few words—you are to walk into a bank and walk out a few minutes later with fifty thousand dollars. All of which you will be able to keep and spend as your heart desires. In your jargon, a piece of cake."

"You're nuts," I said, and I was beginning to believe I was too, sitting there instead of heel-and-toeing it down the street.

"On the contrary, Joseph—may I call you Joseph?" He didn't wait for an answer. "On the contrary, I'm quite sane, although I have an aversion to being poor that borders on the maniacal. As strong probably as your aversion to being incarcerated."

I hadn't caught everything he said, but the way he said it made me think he was serious. "I never did nothin' like that before," I said.

"That is one of the two reasons I've picked you. You're a very small-time hoodlum with more arrests than crimes committed. In a word, Joseph, you're a loser."

"Look, Mister, the biggest caper I ever pulled was stealin' a car, and that got me two-to-five about three hours later. I ain't no bank robber."

"That I am aware of, my friend. I've studied your rap sheet, as they call it, and I found it unimpressive. Grand theft auto—burglary—B and E— You'll correct me if I have trouble with the terminology?"

"You're doin' all right."

"Shoplifting—some minor pickpocketing—somewhat out of character, but shows a bit of bravery—well, no need to go on. You are less than great in your ill-chosen profession, Joseph, and that's my first reason for selecting you. I think that for fifty thousand dollars you can be bought and gift-wrapped, with bows on. I would even go so far as to say I could trust you for that sum, at least as long as I needed you."

"I couldn't pull nothin' like that off in a million years."

"I think you could, with a little help, Joseph. You see—" he chuckled softly "—it's my bank."

The motel room was one of those standard fifteen-dollar-a-night double-

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bedded, chenille-covered, Gideon Bibled homes away from home that the traveling man could relax in and get a decent night's sleep. It wasn't my idea of the Hilton, but it beat hell out of the park bench I'd used the night before. It was in walking distance of the bus line that went downtown, and that's what made it attractive. I was to take the bus to within two blocks of the bank and walk in, and use the bus for my getaway. Just complex enough so I'd have to think about it, but not so difficult that I'd need a rehearsal.

Harriman—he had finally told me his name—William J. Harriman, vice-president and manager of the First National Bank of Lakewood, Colorado—had wanted to keep it as uncomplicated as he possibly could, and I appreciated that.

I walked across the narrow room to the mirrored dresser to examine the new J. Koster, two-bit crook turned big-time bank robber. The reflection showed a fresh haircut (made me look a bit younger), a vandyke, courtesy of my benefactor (whatever you use to stick those things on sure itches like the blazes), and a spanking-new off-the-rack business suit with vest that had knocked the better part out of those two bills.

The beard and the suit I didn't mind. Even the haircut felt pretty good for a change. It was the contents of the briefcase Harriman had handed me as I got out of the Continental that scared the hell out of me.

"You will find all the equipment you will need in this, Mr. Koster—a false beard, four pairs of police handcuffs, and a fully loaded nine-millimeter Browning automatic pistol."

"Now, wait a minute, Mr. Harriman, I'm not havin' nothin' to do with no guns. And I don't know a millimeter from a broom handle."

He had proceeded to convince me that a water pistol or a cap gun simply wouldn't lend authenticity to the caper that he desired, and that a grown man going in to buy either would be suspicious, at best. Besides, he'd told me, I might have to fire a warning shot to keep someone from doing something brave that might cost us both our lives.

I stretched out on the hard bed, propped up the pillows to make myself comfortable, and went over the plan in my head. I was to walk into the bank at precisely 5:50 P.M. and tell Mr. Harriman's secretary that I was inquiring about a loan. She was supposed to seat me behind the railing, where I would wait until he was ready to see me. He said it wouldn't be unusual for a loan applicant to come in that late and I was to remain seated until he came over and introduced himself—at exactly 5:57 P.M.

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That way we would both be at his desk when the guard locked the door at 6:00 P.M.

"We will seem to engage in conversation about your credit, Joseph, until the last customer is out of the bank. This will leave only four of my employees, including the guard, to contend with. I have arranged to let the rest of the staff off early, a gesture that I sometimes make on a Friday afternoon when they seem to have a big weekend planned, which is just about every Friday.

"I want you to listen very carefully, Joseph, because we won't be seeing each other again until you walk into the bank, and this has to go off like clockwork.

"I will then call Leonard—that's my security guard—over to my desk and you will remove the pistol from your briefcase and point it at my head. I rely on you to say something apropos—in your jargon, of course—relating to the fact that if he does not follow your instructions to the letter you will start sweeping the premises with small-arms fire that will surely ruin his weekend. I assure you, my boy, he has never fired his weapon in anger and probably hasn't even drawn it outside of the firing range. Have him remove it from its holster and place it on the desk where you can retrieve it and place it in your briefcase."

Wonderful. Now I would have two guns and a case full of handcuffs—I could start my own prison. That thought appalled me, so I concentrated harder on the rest of the plan.

Let's see, then I was to herd all the employees into the stock room, handcuff everybody but Harriman to the shelves, go back with Harriman into the vault where he would place fifty thousand crisp new dollars in my briefcase, then handcuff him with the rest—preferably next to his pretty secretary—and calmly walk out the back door into oblivion.

But why?

"I'm afraid the explanation is a rather old story, my boy," Harriman had said. "You see, the vault contains seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. It will contain seven hundred thousand dollars after you make good your escape."

I still hadn't seen the connection.

"Joseph, Joseph, my naive bungler—the vault should contain a million five!"

The light bulb above my head went off and almost blinded me. Sure! Silver Continental, ice cubes on his fingers—sure! A piece of cake! Silent

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alarm mysteriously inoperative—his words, not mine—half the staff off, the back door unlocked for an easy getaway—I might just be able to pull it off. But what happens later, when I trip over my shoelaces and the briefcase falls open in front of some local fuzz? What usually happens when I get excited?

"As a witness for the state, my boy, I feel your testimony will be somewhat less than credible. That's the second reason I've chosen you, Joseph. In a word, who is going to believe you haven't hidden the remainder of the money to retrieve later when things have cooled down?"

O.K., who? Right—nobody. I could still hear his high-pitched laughter echoing in the confines of the car as I'd walked across the parking lot onto the dimly lighted street.

The sand was extremely warm. It's funny how one doesn't imagine the relaxation that can be attained by reclining on warm sand with the hot French sun bathing one's body and the sound of the breakers racing toward the Riviera shore when one has slept on cold concrete for most of one's life.

Ah, well—time later for reminiscence. I reached into the shade of the beach umbrella and lifted the iced glass of Tanqueray to my lips that helped me focus on the two topless beauties emerging from the surf directly in front of me. Yes, it was a wonderful day, a good place to be alive and enjoy the wonders of nature.

The previous evening hadn't been all that bad either. The little redhead from Toronto had been interesting, though she had a proclivity for losing at the tables at an alarming rate. The evening had been interesting and profitable, the Canadian wench included. Baccarat was not one of the games I had learned at my mother's knee—but I guess when you're hot you're hot.

I chuckled at that thought and considered, first, my Swiss bank account, with the better part of three quarters of a million on hand, and then Harriman, William J., V.P., lying face down on the floor of his vault with his hands cuffed behind him and his eyes screaming at me from above the tie that was stuffed in his mouth.

Well, it was his idea. I guess that's what changed my luck. You see, I never did nothin' like that before.

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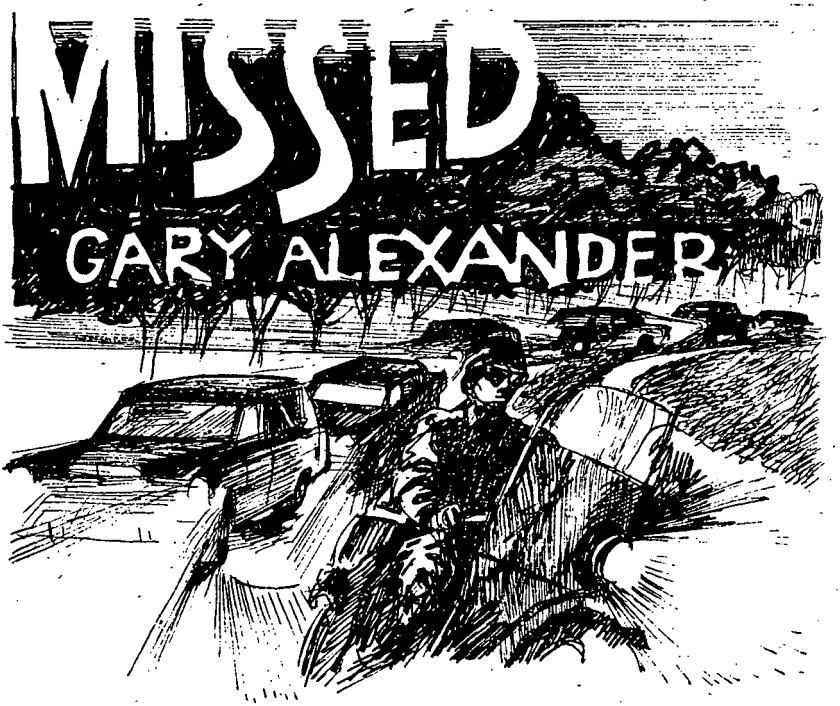
Harvey Eels had passed his prime without ever reaching it . . .



Harvey Eels awakes when the eager summer sun penetrates his room. His drapes are unintentionally gossamer, worn and frayed from age and fatigue. But for twenty dollars a week, Eels expects little more.

He recoils at the harsh light, snuggling under his covers. He assumes the fetal position, and only for a moment does he shunt aside reality. He knows he must arise—he must go out.

He opens his eyes and summons the will to step down on the bare

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floor. Eels is a bony man who has passed his prime without ever reaching it. His joints ache and his head throbs with the toxins that remain from yesterday's bender.

He stretches, groans, then audits his wallet and the pockets of his trousers. $41.57. Is this all that's left? Did he set up the house *again?* Wherever he was.

Such a paltry amount in that take, he laments, and so little to show for it less than a week later. Not to mention the action they forced him to take.

He must go out. He must have traveling money. He should have blown town right after it happened. But he didn't.

Eels lights a cigarette and draws smoke down into the floor of his chest. He stares out at the cruel daylight, the mocking blue skies, the immediate view from his window—an eroding brick wall of a warehouse and its lettering that faded beyond recognition eons ago.

He notes that the building is growing old as gracelessly as himself.

Jerry O'Brien does not awaken with the morning sun. He cannot see it, cannot appreciate the refractions and color-blending it makes as it knifes through the stained glass on an adjacent wall.

In appearance, he rests peacefully, indulging the uncommon luxury of a Thursday holiday by sleeping late. Considering his injuries, the mortuary cosmetologists did a splendid job.

Jerry O'Brien, like Harvey Eels, has a duty to perform later in the day, although others must do it for him. In several hours, people he has loved and who have loved him in return will visit the funeral home to say farewell. He seems comfortable, content.

Eels breaks down his weapon and cleans it. With Eels this is a nervous habit akin to nail-biting. Since he last used it he has done this many times, as if oil and cheesecloth will cleanse the blood from it and from his hands.

It is a Colt .45 automatic—the service model. A month ago he bought it in the shadows of a tavern rest room from someone who needed cash as quickly as Eels does now.

He should have discarded it on Monday right after the trouble, but he didn't. It was a risk, but he may need it again.

The components of the weapon gleam. All foreign matter has been

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removed from corners and crevices of the machined steel. Eels assembles it, stuffs it behind his belt, and zips up his jacket.

He sits for a moment, considering what he has done—what he will do again. Eels has a fiery stone in the pit of his stomach. He wishes it would cool, but he has lived too long and too precariously to be optimistic about anything.

The minister is a family friend. He extols a man of strength, of character. He relates Jerry O'Brien's contributions to his family, his profession, his community. He quotes a few Bible verses, the words of which parallel those he has spoken of the deceased.

People in attendance are uncomfortable for more than one reason; every space on the hard oak pews is filled, friends and strangers alike squeezed together.

The service over, the pallbearers file out first. Then the others, grim and moist-eyed. Jerry O'Brien will be missed.

Harvey Eels selects his bank, a suburban branch of a giant downtown concern. It is located on a thoroughfare a half mile from a freeway entrance.

Earlier he acquired transportation—a Mercury of undetermined vintage with squashed fenders and a steady eruption of blue smoke.

He found it in an unattended parking lot near his rented room, the doors unlocked, the key in the ignition. Eels had been on an enforced sabbatical at a maximum-security institution—ten years away from his trade—when the steering-wheel interlock systems appeared on new cars. He has never quite fathomed their intricacies, so he is always compelled to take whatever careless owners provide as gifts.

Five blocks from his objective, Eels enters a bar and orders a double shot of courage. Two rounds later he suddenly realizes he's on the upswing. The bank branch is a veritable tin can and escape is a moment away. And banks like this are always more concerned with giving out toasters for new accounts than with security.

After another drink, his world has enveloped him with a warm glow. Harvey Eels slams his empty glass down and dismounts the bar stool.

Jerry O'Brien's hearse leads a serpentine caravan of mourners to a brief interment ceremony at the cemetery. The pallbearers' limousine follows,

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trailed by that of the family and the private automobiles of the other mourners. Headlights are on. Off-duty motorcycle policemen work hard to clear intersections. In the business district of the last suburb before the freeway they cover three traffic signals simultaneously—the procession is that long.

Jerry O'Brien will indeed be missed.

Harvey Eels slides his note toward the teller. Business in the bank has been slow, so he has had the luxury of carefully selecting a teller.

This girl is young, possibly a trainee. She wears braces on her teeth. In the past, Eels has sometimes been confronted by grizzled career women who have demanded to see his cards before allowing him to gather in his chips.

If he must draw his weapon—his royal flush—he will attract attention. With this child, he may not have to.

Eels's note is succinct, tautly edited: ALL YOUR MONEY OR I'LL KILL YOU.

The logjam breaks as the first freeway sign is passed; the procession is now moving at nearly half the posted speed limit.

Yet the cemetery is thirty minutes away. The pallbearers in particular have excess time to think. They contemplate mortality, Jerry's and their own. They live too close to the hearse ahead.

Efforts at making conversation are strained, eventually abandoned.

The teller hesitates; her eyes puddle. Eels reads her horror. Something like this always happens to somebody else.

Eels glares at her, then at the grocery bag he has thrust over to her side of the cage. He is telling her without words that he has problems of his own and will not be sympathetic with hers.

The bag fills, bloated with Federal Reserve Notes. A good haul, he decides. A ticket out of town and a vacation—any way he wants to go.

Eels grabs his prize and moves casually toward the door. The instant he touches the handle the damn dizzy bubble-headed overemotional girl loses control. She sobs, cries, trembles, her head darting about the lobby for support and compassion.

Without a single word she has told her tale. Every eye of every person in the bank—employee and customer—locks on a thin, nervous man who

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stands by the door with a paper bag in his hand. A man at the rear of the bank bursts from behind a desk. He could be the manager.

Eels takes his .45 and scans the room with it. He menaces them into suspended animation.

One of the pallbearers, Officer Ed Hayes, Jerry O'Brien's last partner, gazes distractedly out the window of the limo. He wonders, speculates, agonizes. If he hadn't called in with the flu Monday, with that damn summer virus that had been decimating the entire precinct, Jerry wouldn't have had to answer that bank-robbery call alone. And Ed Hayes wouldn't be seated in the rear of an elongated Cadillac at this minute.

If.

As Ed Hayes peers out the glass, he catches a glint, a reflection of sunshine against polished metal. He focuses and sees a man departing a bank, walking in double time toward a clunker parked at the front edge of the lot. The clunker is running, bubbling bluish smoke. The man carries a paper bag in one hand. In the other, pressed against his leg, is a pistol. Hayes lunges forward, slaps the driver on the shoulder, and orders him to stop.

Eels freezes in his tracks thirty feet from the stolen Mercury, startled by the strident roar of motorcycles. Cops' motorcycles too! But they have sped by, around the next turn, out of sight. Then he sees the black limos and the cars behind, with headlights on.

Eels scrambles to the driver's door. Maybe he can slip ahead of this poor jerk they're getting ready to plant. The funeral procession might box out the bulls that will be coming after him from this direction. Perfect!

Then he hears a shout. He turns as a man in a dark suit approaches, revolver in hand. The man shouts again. He is shouting at Harvey Eels.

The funeral procession has drawn to a halt. More men emerge from automobiles. Some also wear dark suits, some are in police uniform. All are closing in on him, pointing revolvers.

Eels doesn't move, doesn't breathe. Carefully he drops his weapon.

He counts as the men grow nearer. Ten, fifteen, twenty, maybe. They are obviously angry; their eyes seem as red as rubies.

Eels isn't certain if this is a hallucination. He decides it isn't when they swarm around him—a navy-blue eclipse—pummel him to the asphalt and handcuff him.

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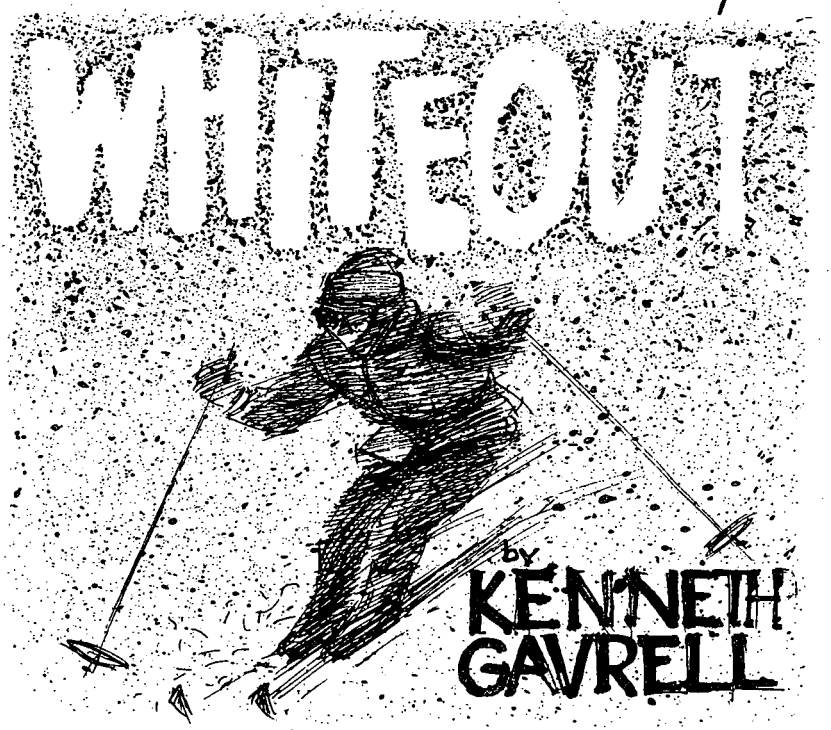
The skier looked like a man without any problems, except that he'd been shot to death . . .



When I was halfway up the top lift, the snow began to come in light flurries. I thought I might make it down before it really started, but by the time I pushed back the safety bar, it was coming thick enough to warm any sentimentalist's heart on Christmas Eve and to freeze any intermediate skier's on an icy mountain top. The LIFT SKI TIPS sign could only be read when it was too late. I hoped no people were standing at the bottom of the lift exit because I'd hit them as soon as I saw them.

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There were five or six people, all right, but they were standing well back from the exit. There are no dummies at the top of the mountain. I joined them at the edge and peered down through the kind of snowfall that looks like a heavy fog. Whiteout. I wouldn't be able to see a damned thing till I got below the snow line. Two young hotshots with jeans and curly locks let out a whoop and pushed off like downhill racers. The rest looked more tentative. They started down slowly, angling among the ghostly pine trees. The snow had already covered the yellow ice patches which had been clearly visible in the noonday sun. I slipped my pole straps over my wrists and started down too.

Thick snowflakes beat against my goggles and the wind howled in my ears. Those two kids must know the mountain very well. For a skier like me, it was a question of keeping the speed down and skiing entirely with the legs. You couldn't see the configuration of the terrain, only feel it when you hit it; your knees had to be your shock absorbers. You couldn't be too low on your skis.

I descended the steep slope, swinging around each tree as it suddenly loomed in front of me, and finally came out on the Meadow, a long, wide, almost treeless area that would take me a good distance toward the midway lift. The Meadow was all big moguls. I couldn't see anyone through the veil of white. I swung down through the giant hills, the snow powdering from my chattering skis, and discovered that the old legs still had enough left even for conditions like these. That was gratifying.

Near the bottom, the Meadow leveled off and smoothed out, and I stood up on the skis to relax my muscles a minute. That's when I saw something low, grey, and bulky through the white veil just ahead. A rock. There was no time to avoid it and I hit it straight on and went over the tips in the worst kind of fall. I sailed across it into a bone-cracking collision with the icy snow, head-first. The bindings gave, or I might have been missing a leg or two.

My mouth and nose were full of snow, my goggles were banged back into my hair, and my right hand hurt like hell where I'd fallen on it. But otherwise I was in reparable condition. I lay for a few seconds, breathing heavily in the thin cold air, and then pushed myself warily to my feet. Everything hurt. I looked back at the rock, but now it didn't look like a rock.

I backed up a bit, dragging my loose skis by the safety straps, to see what it was.

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Under a thin layer of snow lay the hunched body of a man. Something about his absolute and final immobility told me he was dead.

When I bent over to examine him more closely, I found bullet wounds—three of them, in a tight pattern in the lower chest. His face had the calmness of contented sleep—eyes closed, skin still warm. He was about thirty-five, good-looking, and, judging from his outfit, well heeled. He looked like a man without any problems, except that he had been shot to death.

Five minutes later I finally got my skis, boots, poles, and goggles straightened out and was starting down the slope once more. There didn't seem to be anybody else left up on the mountain. I reached the spot where the trail cut off to the left through some scattered trees toward the midway lift. Here there was a smooth icy stretch I remembered from earlier in the day, and I schussed it. Suddenly a stationary figure materialized out of the white just in front of me. I pulled up. It was a woman, resting. She regarded me curiously through her yellow goggles.

"There's a body back there in the snow." I spoke loudly because of the wind.

"What?" she said.

I pointed back toward the Meadow. "A man—shot."

"Are you crazy?" She lifted her goggles. She was young, pretty, brunette, a ski-bunny type, even to the powder-blue outfit that showed off her curves.

"Forget it," I said and pushed off toward the lift. When I reached it, there were only a few skiers gathered there and they weren't going back up—the lift had been shut down because of the weather on top—they were taking a break before continuing down. But the lift operator was sitting in his shack, and I yelled to him to telephone to the bottom for the ski patrol with a sled; someone was seriously hurt above. He put down his magazine, picked up the phone, and asked me how seriously hurt. I let his question sink in and told him he'd better telephone for the cops too.

Two hours later I was sitting in the town police station. There were three others in the office: the police chief, another cop, and my buddy Joe Scully, with whom I'd driven out to Colorado for five days' vacation. That made four cops in all. Joe and I work in the Missing Persons Division back home.

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The chief, named Hewitt, was an old cop who spent most of his time worrying about drunken kids tearing up the local bars. Maybe he had an occasional diversion like wife beating or a traffic accident, but I didn't think he'd seen many homicides.

We were all drinking coffee.

"Quite a coincidence, your being a cop," the chief said.

"Cops ski too," I said.

"How come your buddy wasn't up there with you?"

"I quit early," Joe said. "I get cold."

"He prefers to do most of his skiing at the lodge bar," I explained.

The chief lit another cigarette. He smoked a lot of cigarettes. "Did you hear anything like shots?" he asked. "That guy hadn't been dead long when you found him."

"I didn't hear any shots," I said. "The wind might have carried the sound in another direction."

"You may have been too far up the mountain," the chief said. "There was nobody around the body at all?"

"No. Everybody was scooting down. There was no visibility whatsoever near the top."

"Funny place to shoot somebody," the chief said.

"I'd say it was a damned near perfect place," Joe offered.

"You guys ever worked a homicide?" asked Hewitt.

"I was in Homicide three years," I said.

"Not me," Joe said.

"Maybe you'll be able to give me a few pointers, Timothy," the chief said to me. "I've only been on three killings—all family stuff, no mystery about them. This one will take some work."

"What have you got so far?" I asked.

He slurped a cup of coffee. "His name is Claude Wingfield, age thirty-seven, lawyer, comes from Des Moines. He drives a '79 Honda Accord—my boys located it in the parking lot. Seems he was out here alone, which is unusual. I don't know if he's married—we're checking on that. Waiting on the autopsy for more information. But we found three spent .32 automatic cases near the body."

"Where was he staying?"

"At Green Pine Lodge. We found the key in his pocket. I sent someone down there."

The door opened and another cop appeared. "The victim's married,

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Chief. I talked to his wife on the phone. She's flying out. She'll get here sometime this evening."

The chief looked satisfied. "When were you two planning on leaving?"

"Tomorrow," Joe said.

"Well, keep in touch until then, will you? You might be able to help us out."

"Sure," I said. I wrote down our hotel and room number and slid it across the desk to him. "We'll check back here after dinner," I said.

"Good."

Joe and I went down the street to the first bar we saw and had a couple of beers. The bartender, a big red-faced Scandinavian type, asked us if we'd heard about the murder on the mountain. We said we had. At six o'clock we walked back to our hotel, showered, and then went out to dinner at a place called the Top Sirloin, with a phony Old West decor. By the time we finished eating it was almost eight. We returned to the police station. Chief Hewitt was sitting behind his desk drinking coffee.

"Sit down." He motioned us toward two empty chairs. "We have the results of the autopsy."

"Is Mrs. Wingfield here yet?" I asked.

He shook his head. "She has to change planes at Denver. It'll take a while."

"What does the autopsy say?"

"Three in the lower chest from a .32. Very close range, a yard or so at the most. One pierced the heart. Death was almost instantaneous. What do you think? It sounds to me like it might be a woman: a small-caliber gun at such close range. The guy was married; he came out here skiing without his wife, wasn't wearing a wedding ring."

"Men also carry .32 automatics," I said.

"I think he was hustling," the chief said. "The hotel says he arrived alone, rented a single room."

"How long had he been in town?"

"Three days."

"Did he bring any girls to his room?"

"Who knows? The place is too big to notice that sort of thing."

"There's not much you can do until you talk to his wife," I suggested.

He grunted assent. "She should be here in a couple of hours."

"Where's an interesting place to have a drink in the meantime?"

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"Try the Red Lantern. Nice atmosphere—like a club. It doesn't get too many kids." He gave us directions.

It was still snowing outside. The town, a former mining center, looked postcard-picturesque under the snowfall. The streets were full of skiers, bar-hopping in noisy groups, but the Red Lantern was a more sedate place. It had chandeliers, a long dark-wood bar, plush stools, and candles on the tables. Behind the bar an ornate mirror reflected the chandeliers. The wallpaper was red with black arabesques.

"You like this place?" Joe asked me.

"It's quiet."

"Too grand for my taste," he said.

"Do you feel like walking through the snow some more?"

"No," he admitted.

We took stools at the bar. Joe ordered a Coors and I asked for a margarita—the setting may have suggested it. The bartender was a slightly built man in black bow tie and white shirtsleeves—and red arm garters. I thought that was overdoing it.

When we ordered a second round, the bartender asked us if we were skiers.

"Isn't everybody?" Joe said. "Why do you ask?"

"I heard you talking," the bartender said. "I thought you might be cops."

"Do you get to see a lot of cops?"

"Not here, but I tended bar in Chicago for twenty years. I got to know cops pretty well." He wiped the clean bar with a clean cloth. "And I figured, well, what with the murder—"

"You're right," I told him. "We are cops. But we came out here to ski."

"I saw the guy," the bartender said.

"What?"

"He was in here last night."

"How do you know it was the guy?"

"A fellow who works at the hospital dropped in earlier this evening. He told me his name was Wingfield—tall, good-looking, mid-thirties. Well, a guy named Wingfield following that description was drinking here last night."

"How'd you know his name?"

"He paid the bill with a credit card. But that's not the main reason;

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it was the blonde on his arm that made him stick in my mind. She was wearing one of those see-through blouses."

I could see cop-curiosity in Joe's face. I was leaning across the bar myself. "Yeah?" Joe asked.

"They weren't here too long, maybe forty-five minutes. They were both pretty high. It looked like they were making a round of the night spots and they'd been to several before they got here."

"Chummy?" Joe suggested.

"Couldn't be much chummier. I thought you guys were out here to ski," the bartender said.

"What'd she look like?" Joe asked.

"Like everybody's dream. Long blonde hair, blue eyes, the kind of figure you imagine but don't often see."

"You should be ashamed of yourself," I joked.

"I'm only forty-five," he said. "My knee still jumps when you hit it with a hammer."

"Did you hear any of their conversation?" I asked.

"No. They sat at a table. That table." He pointed to one in a corner under a red wall lamp. "There was one other thing that made me remember him. When they left, he told me to add five dollars for the tip."

"Trying to impress the blonde," I suggested.

"She didn't seem to need any impressing."

"If you see her again, I think Chief Hewitt at the station would be interested to hear."

"I don't like getting involved."

"This was a murder," Joe reminded him.

"You're right," the bartender said. "If I see her, I'll tell the chief."

After the second drink, Joe wanted to move on. We tried two more bars, but the first was full of young kids and loud music and the second had sawdust on the floor and barrels for stools. It also had piped-in Country and Western music. But we ordered two beers. While I was paying for them, a girl walked up and gave me the once-over.

"You're the madman from the mountain."

"I'm the what?"

"I recognize your jacket." She gestured to my ski jacket, red with yellow stripes. "I thought you were nuts when you told me about a man being shot."

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I recognized her then. She looked even prettier without her cap and goggles and in her tight black sweater, but still like a ski bunny.

"Hello again," I said. "Do you want to join us?"

"All right."

Joe made room between us. He also shot me a very meaningful, if not envious, look.

"What's your name?"

"Connie Petersen."

"Bob Timothy. My friend is Joe Scully. What are you drinking?"

"Beer's fine."

I ordered it.

"I suppose I should apologize," she said.

"Under the circumstances it was very understandable," I said.

"All anyone's talking about is the murder."

"I've noticed."

"You must feel funny, being the one who found him."

"I felt pretty funny then," I admitted.

She crinkled her lovely blue-grey eyes. "I like you. How long are you staying?"

"We're leaving tomorrow morning."

"Oh," she said, disappointed. Then, abruptly, "I'd better be going. My boy friend's waiting for me."

"How come he's not with you?"

"He's not my jailer," she said flippantly.

She grabbed her coat from a peg near the bar. "Well, maybe I'll see you around."

"Could be."

She went out through the swinging doors and pushed open the glass door beyond.

"You blew it," Joe said. "I'll be damned if you didn't blow it."

The bartender came up with Connie's beer. Joe and I shared it, then I suggested we go back to the police station.

Mrs. Wingfield had arrived fifteen minutes before us. She was in the chief's office. He'd given instructions to send us in if we came in.

She was handsome and slightly overweight, in her early thirties. She was wearing charcoal-grey slacks, a heavy cream-colored sweater, and a suede coat lined with lamb's wool. She turned to the door as we entered

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and the chief introduced us. Her eyes were dry and she looked very self-possessed.

"Mrs. Wingfield was just telling me about her husband," the chief said. He gave me a quick glance that implied it was an earful.

We sat down.

"So he left on Friday morning," the chief continued, "and arrived here Saturday night. Was he in the habit of taking vacations alone, Mrs. Wingfield?"

"We both have, for many years now." She had a dry, grating voice.

"You didn't get along very well?"

"We'd been married for eleven years. The first two were all right."

"Do you think it's possible your husband was involved with another woman here?"

"Quite possible."

"He'd done that sort of thing before?"

"Oh, yes. Claude was a womanizer. He preferred big-chested, blue-eyed blondes. You notice I'm dark."

"Your husband was seen with a blonde woman last night, Mrs. Wingfield," I interrupted.

The chief raised his eyes at this. This time his eyes said it wouldn't have hurt if I'd filled him in first.

Mrs. Wingfield shrugged her shoulders. "It might have been Marilyn Losser."

"Who's Marilyn Losser?" the chief asked.

"His most recent flame, as far as I know. Somebody else's wife. One of my friends was kind enough to tell me about it."

"All the indications are that your husband came out here alone," the chief said.

"Then I'm afraid I can't help you," she said.

"Do you know the address of this Marilyn Losser?" I asked.

"No. You could try the Des Moines telephone book."

"Do you have any children, Mrs. Wingfield?" I asked.

"No. I suppose you're wondering why I stayed with him. The answer's very simple. Money. I'm not used to doing without it and I'm not very good at making it myself."

"You're very blunt," I said.

"It facilitates things, doesn't it?" she replied bitterly. "What else would you like to know?"

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"Did Mr. Wingfield have any enemies who might want to kill him?" the chief asked.

"You mean besides Marilyn Losser's husband? Yes, quite a few, I imagine." She paused and asked the chief for a cigarette. He passed the pack across and lit one for her. "Claude wasn't an especially likeable man. He wasn't a bad person, but his manner was a bit too self-confident, distant, forceful. He smelled of success. He'd made a name for himself in Des Moines, especially after the scandal two years ago."

"What was that?"

"There was a big political scandal—misuse of municipal funds, bribes, kickbacks. One of the people involved committed suicide."

"What was your husband's part in that?"

"He exposed it. He wasn't a professional do-gooder, but he had information on some people and saw that it would suit his career to make the mess public, so he did."

Chief Hewitt cleared his throat.

"Do you want to see the body now? We need positive identification. But it can wait till tomorrow."

"I'll see it now," she said.

He rose. "I'll have one of my men take you."

"Thank you."

"Do you have a hotel room?"

"I hoped you could help me with that."

"Of course," the chief said.

"I'm willing to stay here as long as you need me," Mrs. Wingfield said, "but I don't want to stay any longer than that."

"I understand," the chief said and went to fetch one of his men.

Joe wanted to get an early start next morning. I wanted to see Chief Hewitt first.

"I'll start packing the stuff on the car," Joe said. "Don't take all morning. It's not your case."

I met Hewitt and another cop coming out of the station as I was going in.

"You're just in time to join us for a walk," Hewitt said.

"Where to?"

"Green Pine Lodge."

"What's up?"

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"Wingfield had a fight with a guy in a bar Monday night. The bar's just down the street from the Green Pine. The fight, apparently, was over a woman—a blonde."

"How did you get that information?"

"Three people volunteered it after they saw Wingfield's picture in last night's paper. One of them knew the other guy. He's staying at the Green Pine. Same as Wingfield was."

For an older man, the chief was a fast walker. We covered the four blocks to the lodge in as many minutes.

Green Pine Lodge was a three-story affair with a lobby full of big-leafed plants. It had oiled wooden walls, a shiny red-tiled floor, and, to the left of the reception desk, a brick fireplace. Two youngish clerks stood behind the desk.

Chief Hewitt asked to see Mrs. Muller.

One of the clerks knocked on a door behind the desk and a woman opened it from inside. The clerk spoke to her a moment and pointed to us. She called, "Come on in, Chief. I've been expecting you."

We walked through the hinged counter and into the office. The chief shut the door after him and introduced me to Mrs. Muller. She took a seat at her desk and we dropped into comfortable armchairs.

She was a woman of about fifty-five—vigorous-looking, with long limbs and fancy inlaid eyeglasses on a gold chain. She looked as if she could handle not only Green Pine Lodge but half of the rest of the town as well. "Well," she said, "I suppose it's about that killing."

"I'm afraid so, Mrs. Muller."

"First time we've ever had anything like that here. The place is fifteen years old."

"It didn't happen here," the chief said. "It happened up on the mountain."

"Still, it was one of our guests."

"True. To tell you the truth, Mrs. Muller, I'm here to check out another of your guests. I don't know his name, but he's about five feet ten, has black hair and a bad complexion. Maybe a hundred and seventy pounds—age thirty or so."

"Staying here alone?"

"I don't know."

"I'll ask the desk clerk."

She went out and returned about three minutes later. "It sounds like

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a man named Aaron—Room 26 on the second floor. He shares the room with a man named Kozinsky. Why are you looking for him?"

"Just a routine inquiry," the chief said.

"I'm not anxious to have the place become notorious," she said.

"It won't, Mrs. Muller. We'll just see if Mr. Aaron's in."

The chief unsnapped his holster and motioned to the other cop to do the same. We walked down the hall to 26 and Hewitt knocked. There was the sound of footsteps and the door swung open. A man in a T-shirt and ski pants stood looking at us. He matched the chief's description perfectly.

"I'm the chief of police," Hewitt told him. "Do you mind if we come in a minute?"

The man backed off to let us enter. "What's this about?"

"Could I see some identification?" the chief asked.

The man pulled his wallet out of a back pocket in his pants and handed it to Hewitt, who checked the driver's license. "Frank Aaron, San Francisco," he verified.

"So?" Aaron said.

The chief handed him back his wallet. "You're here with a friend?"

"That's right. Ralph. He's already out on the slopes. I'm on the way there myself."

"You had a fight at the Silver Lode a couple of nights ago, I understand."

"Maybe. What about it?"

"Know who the guy was?"

"Sure—that dude that's staying down at the end of the hall. The one who thinks he's a movie star."

"Know his name?"

"Nope. I never asked him."

"I guess you haven't been reading the papers," the chief said. "His name was Wingfield, and he was shot to death up on the mountain yesterday afternoon. How come you don't know about it?"

"I haven't been out of this room since four o'clock yesterday afternoon. I was beat. Slept for twelve hours."

It was the wrong reaction. Too pat. He was lying.

"What was the fight about, Mr. Aaron?" the chief asked.

"If you know about the fight, you should know what it was about."

"You tell me."

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"It was over a woman, for God's sake. I was drunk and I tried to move in on the blonde he was with. I wouldn't have tried it if I'd been sober. He got sore. I guess I was pretty obnoxious. But it never got beyond some shouting and a couple of broken glasses."

"Who was the blonde?" I asked him.

"The best-looking woman I've seen in a long time. She was wearing a see-through blouse." He looked from me to Hewitt, then back at me. "Why the hell are you asking me? Ask at the desk. She's staying here."

"It's all coming together," the chief said.

"Do you own a gun, Mr. Aaron?" I asked.

"No," he said. Then he looked down at his shoes. "All right, so I own a gun. You'd find out anyway. What does that prove?"

"You have it with you?"

"It's in the glove compartment of my car, in the lot."

"Show this officer your car," the chief told him. "Let's see if the blonde lady love is in," he said to me.

Aaron went out to the lot with the other cop while the chief and I checked back at the desk. The blonde in question was registered as Jill Howells, Room 9. We walked to the room and knocked. There was no answer and the door was locked.

"Would you know where the lady in Room 9 might be?" Hewitt asked the desk clerk.

"She may be gone. She's only paid through last night."

"You didn't see her go out?"

"No."

"I'd like to have a look at the room," the chief said.

The clerk pulled a key from a hook below the counter and we returned to Room 9. But there wasn't a thing there except an unmade bed, used towels, and the door key on the bureau.

"Not even a stray bobby pin," the chief remarked after we had a look around.

Back at the desk we asked to see the registration card again. Mrs. Muller came out of her office and watched us. The card gave a home address in Omaha. The part about car information was blank.

"Where's her car information?" I asked the clerk.

"She must have come in by plane," he said.

"Then she'd need a taxi to get back to the airport this morning."

He shrugged. "She didn't ask for one at the desk."

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"You're interested in this woman too?" Mrs. Muller asked.

"She seems to have known Wingfield," the chief said.

The policeman entered the lobby with Aaron. In the cop's hand was a Colt .38.

"Did you find anything else interesting in the car?" the chief asked him. He shook his head no. "Put the gun back," the chief said. He turned to Aaron, who looked cold after his excursion outside in his T-shirt. "O.K., that's all. When are you planning to leave town?"

"Friday."

"Fine," the chief said. "If we need you for anything we'll get in touch."

Aaron walked upstairs. The chief thanked Mrs. Muller for her help and we started back toward the station.

"Aaron's lying about not knowing about the murder," I said. "But I don't think he's involved—just scared."

"Not unless he owns two guns," Hewitt said.

"The girl's Omaha address is a phony. Check Des Moines. But I don't think you'll turn up much. The name's a phony too."

"It might just be a coincidence, their being in the same hotel," Hewitt said.

"Might be."

"What time are you leaving?"

"An hour ago. Joe must be frothing at the mouth."

"Well, thanks for your help," he said.

"Good luck."

He just frowned and kept on walking.

We drove through the mountains with snow twelve feet deep beside the road. We drove through slushy Denver. It was a clear afternoon and we watched the blue Rockies dwindle on the horizon for a hundred miles. That night we stayed at a motel in Ogallala. The next morning we continued northward across flat, dull Nebraska, where we hit a blizzard around North Platte, then through Omaha and on into flat, dull Iowa. The weather was grey and dreary the second day. We ate at truck stops. Joe consistently exceeded the fifty-five-mile speed limit. He said that driving under seventy on Interstate 80 was like shoveling snow with a teaspoon. Every three hours we switched the driving. By nine in the evening we were passing Des Moines.

"About time to stop for a motel," I suggested.

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"Don't you want to push through?"

"Why strain ourselves?"

"Saves some money," Joe said.

"The tab's on me," I said.

"You know what I think?"

"No. What?"

"I bet as soon as we reach a motel you're going to make a phone call to a local blonde named Marilyn Losser."

"Could be."

"I'd be willing to bet quite a lot on it," Joe said.

There were only two Lossers in the phonebook, and I hit her on the first try. Luckily she answered and not her husband.

"Mrs. Losser, my name's Lieutenant Bob Timothy. I'm a policeman."

"What is it?" she said anxiously. "Has someone had an accident?"

"In a way," I said. "The person involved is Claude Wingfield."

"I never heard of him," she said, still sounding worried. "What is this?"

"He's been involved in an accident. I'm on the case. I realize you can't talk on the phone."

"No," she said, "I can't."

"I can come by your place in the morning while your husband's at work. Or, if you prefer, we can meet somewhere."

"How do I know you're on the up-and-up?"

"I'm trying to avoid any problems for you," I said.

"I'd prefer the second alternative," she said after a pause.

"You have a car?"

"Yes."

"What about in the coffee shop of the Colonial Motel? It's near the interstate."

"I know where it is. All right."

"Ten o'clock tomorrow morning?"

"That's fine," she said. "I'll be wearing a yellow coat." She hung up.

Joe had been listening from his bed. "I think it would be better if I met her alone," I said. "Two of us might scare her. She's half expecting a shakedown."

The next morning was grey and chilly. We had breakfast in the coffee shop, then at a quarter to ten Joe went back upstairs and I waited,

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watching through the window. Almost exactly fifteen minutes later, a blue Nova pulled up outside and a very pretty blonde in a yellow coat got out. She was alone.

When she came through the door, she looked around uncertainly. Her eyes fell on me, and I signaled her toward the table. She angled through the crowded restaurant, and all the men in the place accompanied her with their eyes until she slid into the seat across from me.

"You're the policeman?"

"That's right."

"Let me see your badge."

I showed it to her. She was nervous. She didn't look at it closely enough to see that it was out-of-state.

"What's this about Claude Wingfield? You ruined a night's sleep for me."

"He's been shot." I watched her face. Either it was a real shock or she was a wonderful actress.

"Is it bad?" she said. "Who did it?"

"We don't know who did it. That's why I'm here. It's bad."

"How bad?" Her blue eyes searched my face.

"He's dead."

She started to cry. It was real crying—there was no faking that. I remembered, by contrast, what Wingfield's wife's reaction had been.

I waited for her to pull herself together. "Was your husband in town on Tuesday, Mrs. Losser?"

She blew her nose. "Jack? Don't be crazy. Jack would never do a thing like that."

"Are you sure?"

"I haven't seen Claude since last summer. Women didn't last long with Claude. Jack suspected—he hated Claude—but he's not the type—"

"Was he in town on Tuesday?"

"Jack hasn't been out of town since he went fishing in Canada last July." She was clenching her wet, balled handkerchief. "God, I can't believe it. How did it happen?"

"He was on a skiing vacation in Colorado. Someone shot him to death on the slopes."

"And you have no idea who?"

"An idea or two—yes. Not much in the way of facts yet."

"I never quite got over Claude," she said as if talking to herself. "I'm

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sorry, but I can't help you, Lieutenant Timothy. *I* can't think who might have shot him."

"Do you know of any other blonde woman he'd been seeing recently?"

"No. Do you think it was a woman?"

"He was with a blonde out there. She disappeared right after the murder."

"I've been in town all week," she said defensively. "I can prove that in two minutes."

"You don't have to prove it. I believe you."

"And so has my husband," she said.

"I'm sorry I wasted your time, Mrs. Losser. Do you want a cup of coffee?"

"Yes," she said.

"Well?" Joe said as I came in.

"She's not the blonde we're looking for."

"What about the husband?"

"She says he hasn't left town."

"Well, are you ready to go home?"

"Not yet. I want to call Mrs. Wingfield. She's probably back in town. Throw me that phonebook. And after I talk to her, I think I'm going to pay a visit to the *Des Moines Register*."

"What for?" Joe asked.

"To look at pictures."

We waited till six o'clock to drive over. Most people are home around dinner time.

The apartment house was in a nice part of town. Joe was wearing his gun. There was a guard at the entrance, but when we flashed our badges he let us through. The inner lobby was marble and there were paintings on the walls. We took the elevator up to the sixth floor and got out into a carpeted hallway with indirect lighting. The apartment we wanted was the last on the right. We could hear the faint sound of a radio or stereo through the solid door. Joe stood off to the side against the wall. I planted myself in front of the peephole and knocked.

The first knock brought no response. I knocked again, louder. The peephole slid open. There was a pause, then the door opened a bit, and I saw her pretty face through the crack.

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"You," she said. "How in the world—"

"Mind if I come in?"

"I don't know—" There was a chain on the door.

"It's pretty uncomfortable talking like this," I said.

She hesitated, then slipped the chain. I pushed through fast, and Joe was right behind me. Before she fully comprehended the situation, he'd closed the door behind us.

"What the hell is this?" she said angrily.

"You're a pretty fearless girl," I said. "But I guess if you can kill somebody you've got to be fearless."

"Who are you guys?"

I took out my badge and so did Joe. She studied them carefully. "Aren't you a little bit off your beat?"

"I'm on my beat," I said. "You forget—I'm the one who fell over his body."

"I don't know what you're doing here or what you're talking about," she said. She snapped off the radio. Her lovely blue-grey eyes were flashing. The beige negligee she was wearing showed enough of her figure to explain why that see-through blouse would make grown men do silly things.

"From what I hear, you must be even more fetching as a blonde, Miss Brower. Or do you prefer Petersen—or Howells?"

"Get out of here."

"Why don't we sit down?"

"I said get out."

"All right, I'll sit down." Joe remained on his feet. So did she, fuming.

"You really had us running around," I said. "That blonde hair was a neat, if obvious, idea. He was a guy who went for blondes. Whose idea was it to go out to Colorado separately?"

She stared at me.

"And whose idea was the separate rooms? His, I'll bet. He liked to be careful. He was an up-and-coming man in this town. Up-and-coming as a result of what he'd done to your father and several other politicians here. But only your father broke down and committed suicide."

A strange noise came from her throat.

"The idea of the Colorado trip suited you perfectly, didn't it? You thought you'd never be connected with his being murdered out there. On the day you killed him, you redyed your hair to its natural color. That

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was necessary so that he'd recognize you before you shot him. Most revenge murderers need that satisfaction. It also facilitated your leaving town; you'd been seen around with him as a blonde—a very noticeable blonde. Are you ready to go downtown to the station?"

Suddenly she looked very tired—the way they look when they know they've had it. I saw Joe relax.

She went over to a wall table and plucked a cigarette from a pack lying on top. Then she searched for a light. I reached into my pocket for my lighter but before I'd brought it out she'd opened the table drawer and come up with a .32 automatic in her hand.

Joe spit out a nasty word and I dropped the lighter. She held the gun on us with remarkable steadiness.

"The penalty for being male chauvinists," she said sarcastically. "You'd have been more careful if I were a man."

"You can't shoot both of us before one jumps you," I said.

"Don't underestimate me. My father trained me to use this. He said a girl needed to know how to protect herself."

Joe repeated the nasty word.

"I don't want to shoot you," she said. "I just want to get out."

"Where can you go?"

"I'll take my chances. Move over there next to your friend."

I got off the chair and did as she said. The gun was very steady. She reached behind her with her left hand, pulled open the drawer next to the one that had held the gun, and took out a handful of the sort of heavy hemp cord that's used for tying large parcels.

"Tie each other's ankles with this." She threw the loose cord toward us. It made it only halfway. She came across the room and kicked at it. She was now about five feet from us, and Joe did a foolhardy thing: he made a hard kick for the gun in her right hand. With nine women out of ten it might have worked, but she had the shot off before his foot struck her hand. I saw him go down as the gun flew back over her shoulder, landing next to the sofa. We both dove for it, but she had her hand on it before we reached it. I grabbed her wrist with both hands and put on all the pressure I could. Her grasp on the automatic loosened quickly, but not before we'd tumbled around a bit and she'd dug her teeth into my arm. Even after she dropped the gun she didn't stop fighting, lashing out at me with her hands and feet and landing one very good kick into my left shin. Finally I had to bear-hug her from behind

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to protect myself. Joe was getting to his feet. "Where'd it hit you?" I asked.

"Shoulder. I'll be all right." He held his hand against the wound. His face showed that the slug hurt.

"Get your gun out!" I said. "I can't hold her like this forever."

"I thought maybe you were enjoying it," Joe said and got his gun out.

As I'd expected, she wasn't very cooperative downtown, but we gradually got the story. It was essentially as I'd surmised. If ever a man had helped to arrange his own murder it was Claude Wingfield. He had made the play for her, had proposed the ski vacation, and suggested all the precautions. He'd had some paranoid notion that his wife was having him followed for an expensive divorce action.

On the day of the murder, she had said she was tired and would stay at the lodge. He'd gone up the mountain himself, and she had then redyed her hair brunette, left the lodge, and found him on the slopes. The snowfall had been providential, but she would have shot him in a deserted spot in any case.

While she was coming out with it, Joe put a call through to Chief Hewitt to tell him his homicide was solved.

The next-morning we were on Route 80 again. I drove because of Joe's shoulder.

"When did you suspect it might be the brunette?" he asked.

"That night at the bar. Some murderers are like a person with a scab—they can't leave it alone. She had to have a few words with the man who had found her victim. But my real suspicion started when the Losser lead didn't pan out. That's when I rethought everything and decided to check the municipal-scandal angle. The call to Mrs. Wingfield gave me the information that the man who'd committed suicide had a daughter about the right age. The trip to the *Register*'s photo files told me the daughter was our brunette from Colorado. Then it was just a question of checking the phonebook."

"Too bad you didn't do this on your own beat," Joe said.

"Maybe Chief Hewitt will put in a good word for us," I said. "You know, in one respect this has a happy ending."

"How?"

"Mrs. Wingfield gets to keep his money without having to keep her miserable excuse for a husband."

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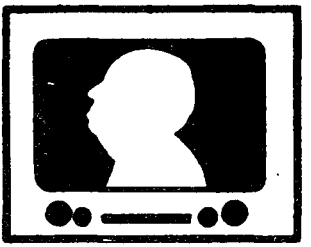

CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

It's always a season to rejoice—television season, that is—when *Mystery!* returns to the airwaves. This year the Public Television anthology of the best of British thrillers, suspense stories, and detective dramas—actually a culling of the cream of recent English mystery "plays," as TV shows are called over there—will present for its second season some familiar faces and some new ones. The Falstaffian barrister Rumpole returns to stalk Old Bailey (great news, indeed!), the jockey-detective of Dick Francis' *The Racing Game* will ride again, and Scotland Yard's Sergeant Cribb will in five new episodes fret over bizarre byways of Victorian crime.

The new host this season will be none other than Vincent Price. "I'm attuned to mysteries," Price comments—not without justification, considering his rich contributions to the genre across the decades. "I'm delighted to be involved with a program that provides the kind of solid, suspense-filled dramas which are all too rare in today's television." Sort of a Renaissance bogeyman, cultured yet saturnine, Price is far too diverse to be associated strictly with mystery and horror. He is a gourmet cook, an author and lecturer, an authority on art history. However, he is the actor most linked with the works of Poe on the screen and, since the death of Karloff, America's foremost shudder star.

Not always was it thus—although the St. Louis-born actor made his dramatic debut as a Chicago policeman in a London stage play while studying abroad. His early film roles were often costume dramas like

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Elizabeth and Essex and *Brigham Young*—and his parts, oftener than not, were gentle. In *Laura* he is a weakling red herring. In *Tower of London* he is a victim! (Although in the much-later remake he gets his own back by portraying the villainous Richard.) Then, in 1953, he was given the role of the deranged sculptor seeking waxen vengeance in the highly successful *House of Wax*, and his statuesque performance made him thereafter a horror-film fixture: *The House on Haunted Hill, The Fly, The Bat*. As the doomed Roderick in Roger Corman's 1961 *The Fall of the House of Usher*, he began his association with a long series of films drawn from the works of Edgar Allan Poe, some only vaguely inspired but almost all filled with appropriate dread and gloom. Some of Price's films are quite inventive and deserve critical attention, such as *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, in which he literally returns from the grave, and *Theater of Blood*, in which he plays an actor who cuts his critics down to size. (In the latter film, Diana Rigg is his daughter.)

Now with considerable weekly aplomb he can say, "For *Mystery!*, I'm Vincent Price." It is a happy choice of host.

The selections he will introduce across the twenty episodes of this year's series prove interesting as well, kicking off with a two-part dramatization of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The story is one of the screen's most popular themes, even though all the adaptations have revealed far earlier than Stevenson what was meant to be a surprise: that Jekyll actually *is* Hyde. There were already five screen adaptations before 1921, when John Barrymore portrayed the duo more with changes in facial mannerisms than reliance on makeup or trick effects.

Fredric March won an Academy Award in 1932 for his simian, hirsute Hyde, and the Spencer Tracy MGM version of 1941 was memorable for its casual sadism (against Ingrid Bergman).

The movies have experimented extensively with this classic case of split personality. Films have spawned both a son and a daughter for Dr. Jekyll. Boris Karloff and Jerry Lewis have done comic interpretations of the role, and Kirk Douglas contemplated a musical version. Basil Rathbone and Jack Palance starred on television—the latter in an Edgar-winning script. English actor Paul Massie in *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* played a bearded, dour scientist who transforms into a younger, handsome, clean-shaven Hyde—adding to the tale a touch of reverse werewolfery and Dorian Gray! Another English film, *Dr. Jekyll and Sister*

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Hyde (Ralph Bates, Martine Beswick), has the doctor change into a beautiful, dangerous woman—a test-tube transsexual.

"What Stevenson hit upon," remarks Jonathan Powell of the BBC, producer of the *Mystery!* adaptation, commenting on Jekyll's undying popularity, "is a theme which has continued to strike a responsive chord from his day to our own. The doctor and his darker side have fired the imagination of readers and viewers alike for nearly a century. It has been done, and will continue to be done, as long as there remain new aspects of the basic plot to be developed, new perspectives to explore. Creative people in the film, television, and theater world can't seem to keep their hands off it."

Does that hint that the basic Stevenson plot will be altered? *Mystery!* does take liberties with the character(s). Dr. Jekyll is in this version portly, middle-aged, and balding, with mutton-chop whiskers covering puffy cheeks—very solid and "square-rigged." He is also hesitant as he trods the back alleys and dens off Leicester Square, driven to sins of the flesh but weighed down with "an abysmal sense of shame." He has long been absorbed with the duality of man, of good and evil housed in the same body. "If the twin sides of my nature could be separated, then the unjust could go its own way without disgracing his more upright twin, and I could continue my good works . . . "

The separation, when it does occur, transforms the paunchy, timid Jekyll into a Hyde who is dashing, aggressive, and handsome—far different from the sinister, gnarled figure Stevenson envisioned. Hyde is wicked, yes—among his victims is a fourteen-year-old flower girl—but he is also something of a romantic figure, not bounded by Jekyll's moral rigidity, and the heroine (a character not found in the Stevenson original) voluntarily succumbs to his free and easy hedonism. Hyde is everything Jekyll could not be—unrestrained as well as youthful—and producer Powell places the twin figures "within the context of a society that was itself morally schizophrenic in many respects."

Finally, at the end, we see for one terrifying moment the Jekyll/Hyde character in a further incarnation—trapped in the process of transformation.

Interestingly, this version of the tale attempts for the first time to identify the arcane drugs which unleash Hyde—potions which in the Stevenson story Jekyll finally must scurry to all the chemists of London to replace. The television Jekyll tells us the formula is "an amalgam based

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on opium derivatives and the alkaloid from South American mescal made soluble in ether." Put that in your pipe!

To play the title roles, David Hemmings was cast—the same Hemmings who was the photographer in *Blowup* and the pianist who probes a psychic's murder in Dario Argento's dazzling *Deep Red*. He is surprisingly good both as the stout, aging Jekyll and the almost Byronic Hyde, in an adaptation of the classic story that is almost Dickensian. The grim prisons, the massive, wintry fortresses of the rich, not more than ten minutes away (we are told) from the rat-infested slums and back-alley brothels—these are the settings through which a confident Hyde strides untrammelled. It is not quite the Hyde we've known of old, and certainly not the definitive version of the original story; but still an interesting new look at a tale which, Stevenson said, was "about a fellow who was two fellows—one good, one evil."

Mystery! follows its Jekyll-Hyde with a four-part adaptation of Francis Iles's *Malice Aforethought*, the famous novel about a country doctor who contemplates poisoning his wife. The title comes from British judicial phraseology, the familiar line which goes: "who feloniously, willfully, and with malice aforethought did kill . . ." We will report on the doctor's plight—he finds poison addictive—in the next issue.

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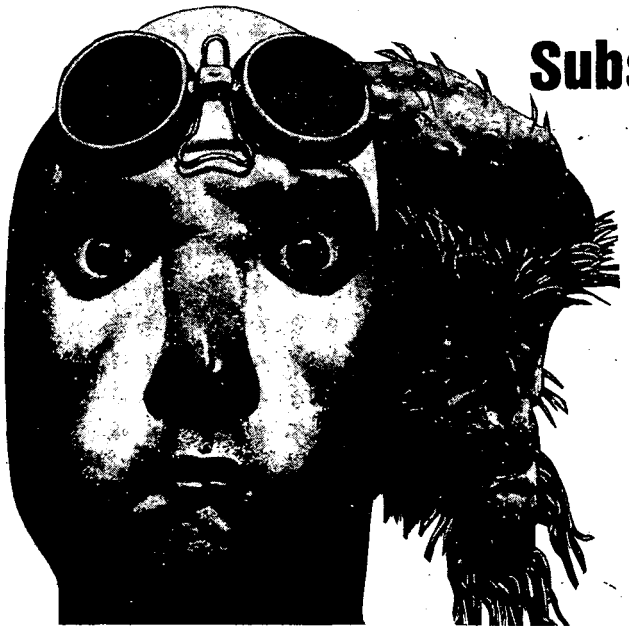

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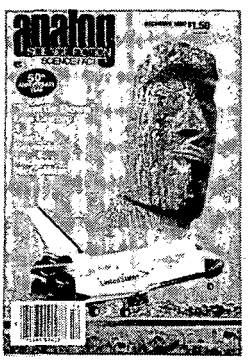

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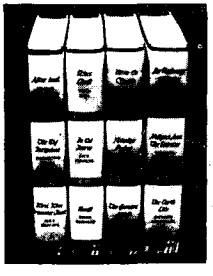

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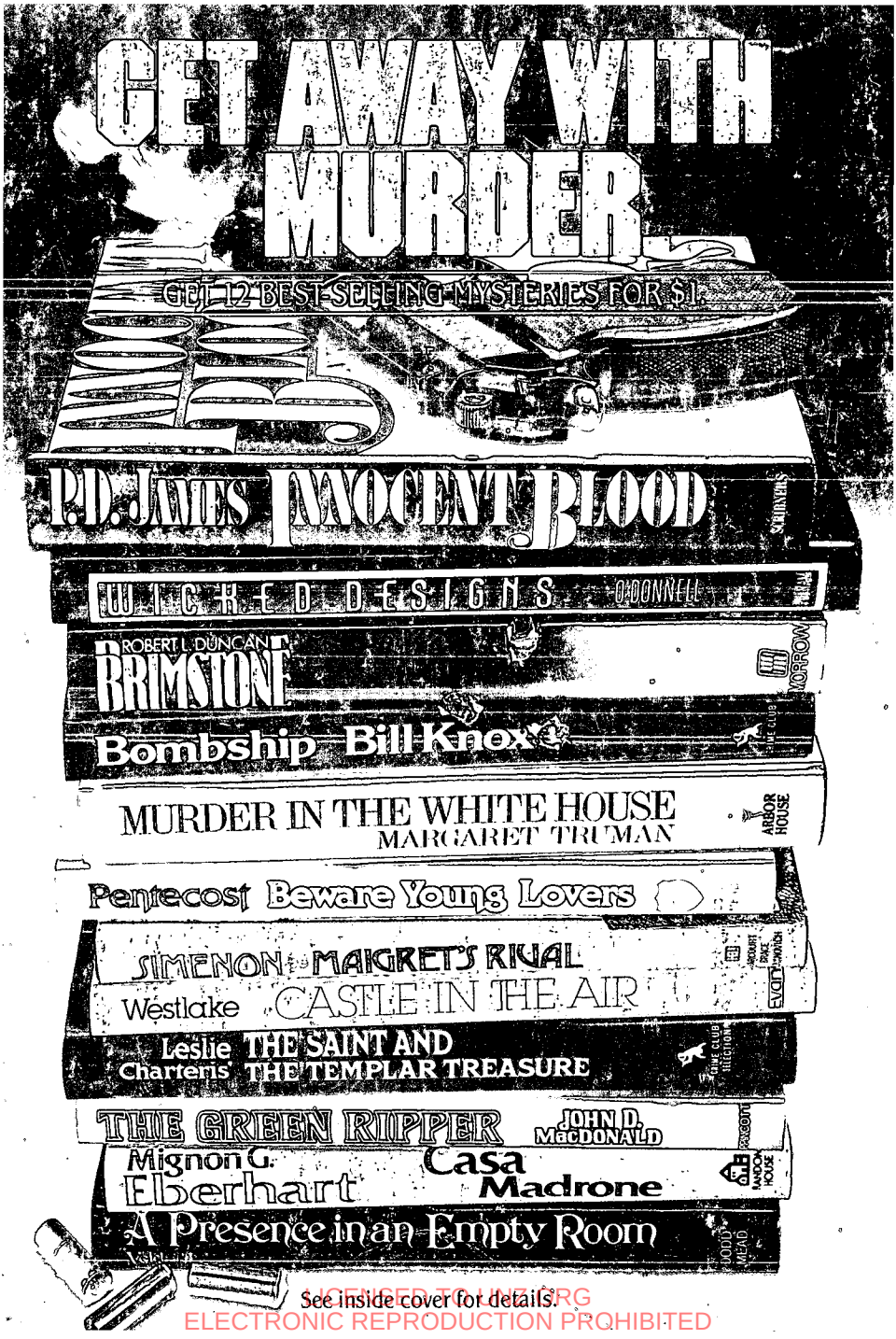

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